

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

A
TRAGEDY.

BY MR. JAMES THOMSON.

ADAPTED FOR
THEATRICAL REPRESENTATION,

AS PERFORMED AT THE
THEATRES-ROYAL, DRURY-LANE AND COVENT-GARDEN.

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"The Lines distinguished by inverted Commas, are omitted in the Representation."

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M DCC XCII.



TO
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
FREDERICK,
PRINCE OF WALES.

SIR,

THE honour your Royal Highness has done me in the protection you was pleased to give to this Tragedy, emboldens me to lay it now at your feet, and beg your permission to publish it under Royal Patronage. The favouring and protecting of letters has been, in all ages and countries, one distinguishing mark of a great prince; and that with good reason, not only as it shews a justness of taste, and elevation of mind, but as the influence of such a protection, by exciting good writers to labour with more emulation in the improvement of their several talents, not a little contributes to the embellishment and instruction of society. But of all the different species of writing, none has such an effect upon the lives and manners of men, as the dramatic; and therefore, that of all others most deserves the attention of princes; who, by a judicious approbation of such pieces as tend to promote all public and private virtue, may more than by any coercive methods, secure the purity of the stage, and in consequence thereof, greatly advance the morals and politeness of their people. How eminently your Royal Highness has always extended your favour and patronage to every art and science, and in a particular manner to dramatic performances, is too well known to the world for me to mention it here. Allow me only to wish, that what I have now the honour to offer to your Royal Highness, may be judged not unworthy of your protection, at least in the sentiments which it inculcates. A warm and grateful sense of your

*goodness to me, makes me desirous to seize every occasion
of declaring in public, with what profound respect and duti-
ful attachment, I am,*

Sir,

Your Royal Highness's

most obliged,

most obedient, and

most devoted servant,

JAMES THOMSON.

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

THIS is the only play of THOMSON's that has been of late performed upon our theatres. The genius of this amiable Poet did not naturally lead him to Tragedy: the desire of profit seems to have induced him to become a Tragic Poet, in which walk of literature his superiors are much more numerous than in the descriptive and the allegoric.

Drawing, however, from a master so consummate as LE SAGE, the present play could not but be interesting and busy; displaying events suitable to the ends of Tragedy, as calling forth terror, and demanding pity.

It is singular that THOMSON should not have hinted at the source from which TANCRED was derived. His age, however, might have scrupled a drama drawn from GIL BLAS. The incidents therein are closely followed, and there appears to be much poetic address and classical purity in the disposition of the circumstances and the colouring of the sentiments.

PROLOGUE.

*BOLD is the man! who, in this nicer age,
Presumes to tread the chaste corrected stage.
Now, with gay tinsel arts, we can no more
Conceal the want of Nature's sterling ore.
Our spells are vanish'd, broke our magic wand,
That us'd to waft you over sea and land.
Before your light, the fairy people fade,
The demons fly—the ghost itself is laid.
In vain of martial scenes the loud alarms,
The mighty prompter thundering out to arms,
The playhouse posse clattering from afar,
The close-wedg'd battle, and the din of war.
Now, even the senate seldom we convene;
The yawning fathers nod behind the scene.
Your taste rejects the glittering false sublime,
To sigh in metaphor, and die in rhyme.
High rant is tumbled from his gallery throne:
Description, dreams—nay, similies are gone.*

*What shall we then? to please you how devise,
Whose judgment sits not in your ears nor eyes?
Thrice happy! could we catch great Shakspeare's art,
To trace the deep recesses of the heart:
His simple, plain sublime, to which is given
To strike the soul with darted flame from heaven:
Could we awake soft Otway's tender woe,
The pomp of verse and golden lines of Rowe.*

*We to your hearts apply: let them attend;
Before their silent, candid bar we bend.
If warm'd, they listen, 'tis our noblest praise:
If cold, they wither all the Muse's bays.*

Dramatis Personæ.

DRURY-LANE.

Men.

TANCRED, Count of Leece, - - - - - Mr. Kemble.
MATTEO SIFFREDI, Lord High Chancellor of Sicily, Mr. Bensley.
EARL OSMOND, Lord High Constable of Sicily, - - Mr. Barrymore.
RODOLPHO, Friend to Tancred, and Captain of the Guards, Mr. Benson.

Women.

SIGISMUNDA, Daughter of Siffredi, - - - - - Mrs. Powell.
LAURA, Sister of Rodolpho, and Friend to Sigismunda, Mrs. Kemble.

Barons, Officers, Guards, &c.

COVENT-GARDEN.

Men.

TANCRED, Count of Leece, - - - - - Mr. Holman.
MATTEO SIFFREDI, Lord High Chancellor of Sicily, Mr. Hull.
EARL OSMOND, Lord High Constable of Sicily, - - Mr. Farren.
RODOLPHO, Friend to Tancred, and Captain of the Guards, Mr. Macready.

Women.

SIGISMUNDA, Daughter of Siffredi, - - - - - Mrs. Merry.
LAURA, Sister of Rodolpho, and Friend to Sigismunda, Mrs. Mountain.

Barons, Officers, Guards, &c.

SCENE, the City of Palermo in Italy.



TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The Palace. Enter SIGISMUNDA and LAURA.

Sigismunda.

Ah, fatal day to Sicily! the king
Touches his last moments!

Laura. So 'tis fear'd.

Sig. "The death of those distinguish'd by their station,
" But by their virtue more, awakes the mind
" To solemn dread, and strikes a saddening awe:
" Not that we grieve for them, but for ourselves,
" Left to the toil of life—And yet the best
" Are, by the playful children of this world,
" At once forgot, as they had never been."

10

Laura, 'tis said, the heart is sometimes charged
With a prophetic sadness: such, methinks,
Now hangs on mine. The king's approaching death
Suggests a thousand fears. What troubles thence
May throw the state once more into confusion,
What sudden changes in my father's house
May rise, and part me from my dearest Tancred,
Alarms my thoughts.

Laura. The fears of love-sick fancy!

Perversely busy to torment itself.

20

But be assured, your father's steady friendship,
Join'd to a certain genius, that commands,
Not kneels to fortune, will support and cherish
Here in the public eye of Sicily,
This, I may call him, his adopted son,
The noble Tancred, form'd to all his virtues.

Sig. Ah, form'd to charm his daughter!—This fair morn
Has tempted far the chase. Is he not yet
Return'd?

Laura. No.—When your father to the king,
Who now expiring lies, was call'd in haste,
He sent each way his messengers to find him;
With such a look of ardour and impatience,
As if this near event was to Count Tancred
Of more importance than I comprehend.

30

Sig. There lies, my Laura, o'er my Tancred's birth
A cloud I cannot pierce. With princely accost,
Nay, with respect, which oft I have observ'd,
Stealing at times submissive o'er his features,
In Belmont's woods my father rear'd this youth—
Ah, woods! where first my artless bosom learn'd
The sighs of love.—He gives him out the son
Of an old friend, a baron of Apulia,
Who in the late crusado bravely fell.
But then 'tis strange; is all his family
As well as father dead? and all their friends,
Except my sire, the generous good Siffredi?
Had he a mother, sister, brother left,
The last remain of kindred; with what pride,
What rapture, might they fly o'er earth and sea,
To claim this rising honour of their blood!
This bright unknown! this all-accomplish'd youth!

40

50

Who charms too much the heart of Sigismunda !
 " Laura, perhaps your brother knows him better,
 " The friend and partner of his freest hours."
 What says Rodolpho ? Does he truly credit
 The story of his birth ?

Laura. He has sometimes,
 Like you, his doubts : yet, when maturely weigh'd,
 Believes it true. As for Lord Tancred's self, 60
 He never entertain'd the slightest thought
 That verg'd to doubt ; but oft laments his state,
 By cruel fortune so ill pair'd to yours.

Sig. Merit like his, the fortune of the mind,
 Beggars all wealth—Then, to your brother, Laura,
 He talks of me ?

Laura. Of nothing else. Howe'er
 The talk begin, it ends with Sigismunda.
 Their morning, noontide, and their evening walks,
 Are full of you, and all the woods of Belmont 70
 Enamour'd with your name——

Sig. Away, my friend ;
 You flatter——yet the dear delusion charms.

Laura. No, Sigismunda, 'tis the strictest truth,
 Nor half the truth, I tell you. Even with fondness
 My brother talks for ever of the passion
 That fires young Tancred's breast. So much it strikes him,
 He praises love as if he were a lover.

" He blames the false pursuits of vagrant youth,
 " Calls them gay folly, a mistaken struggle 80

" Against best judging nature." Heav'n, he says,

•In lavish bounty form'd the heart for love ;

In love included all the finer seeds

Of honour, virtue, friendship, purest bliss——

Sig. Virtuous Rodolpho !

Laura. Then his pleasing theme
He varies to the praises of your lover.—

Sig. And what, my *Laura*, says he on the subject?

Laura. He says that, though he was not nobly born,
Nature has form'd him noble, generous, brave, 90
“ Truly magnanimous, and warmly scorning
“ Whatever bears the smallest taint of baseness;
“ That every easy virtue is his own;
“ Not learn'd by painful labour, but inspir'd,
“ Implanted in his soul.”—Chiefly one charm
He in his graceful character observes;
That though his passions burn with high impatience,
And sometimes, from a noble heat of nature,
Are ready to fly off; yet the least check
Of ruling reason brings them back to temper, 100
And gentle softness.

Sig. True; oh, true, *Rodolpho*!
Blest be thy kindred worth for loving his!
He is all warmth, all amiable fire,
All quick heroic ardour! temper'd soft
With gentleness of heart and manly reason!
If virtue were to wear a human form,
To light it with her dignity and flame,
Then soft'ning mix her smiles and tender graces;
Oh, she would choose the person of my *Tancred*! 110
Go on, my friend, go on, and ever praise him;
The subject knows no bounds, nor can I tire,
While my breast trembles to that sweetest music!
The heart of woman tastes no truer joy,
Is never flatter'd with such dear enchantment—
“ 'Tis more than selfish vanity”—as when
She hears the praises of the man she loves—

Laura. Madam, your father comes.

Enter SIFFREDI.

Sif. [*To an attendant as he enters.*] Lord Tancred
Is found?

120

Atten. My lord, he quickly will be here.

"I scarce could keep before him, though he bid me

"Speed on, to say he would attend your orders."

Sif. 'Tis well—retire—You too, my daughter, leave me.

Sig. I go, my father—But, how fares the king?

Sif. He is no more. Gone to that awful state,
Where kings the crown wear only of their virtues.

Sig. How bright must then be his!——This stroke is
sudden;

He was this morning well, when to the chase
Lord Tancred went.

130

Sif. 'Tis true. But at his years
Death gives short notice—Drooping nature then,
Without a gust of pain to shake it, falls.

His death, my daughter, was that happy period
Which few attain. The duties of his day
Were all discharg'd, "and gratefully enjoy'd
"Its noblest blessings;" calm as evening skies
Was his pure mind, and lighted up with hopes
That open heaven; when, for his last long sleep
Timely prepar'd, a lassitude of life,

140

A pleasing weariness of mortal joy,
Fell on his soul, and down he sunk to rest.
Oh, may my death be such!—He but one wish
Left unfulfill'd, which was to see Count Tancred—

Sig. To see Count Tancred!—Pardon me, my lord—

Sif. For what, my daughter?—But, with such emotion,
Why did you start at mention of Count Tancred?

Sig. Nothing—I only hop'd the dying king

Might mean to make some generous just provision
For this your worthy charge, this noble orphan. 150

Sif. And he has done it largely—Leave me now—
I want some private conference with Lord Tancred.

[*Exeunt Sigismunda and Laura.*]

My doubts are but too true—If these old eyes
Can trace the marks of love, a mutual passion
Has seiz'd, I fear, my daughter and this prince,
My sovereign now—Should it be so? Ah, there,
There lurks a brooding tempest, that may shake
My long concerted scheme, to settle firm
The public peace and welfare, which the king
Has made the prudent basis of his will— 160
Away, unworthy views! you shall not tempt me!
Nor interest, nor ambition, shall seduce
My fix'd resolve—Perish the selfish thought,
Which our own good prefers to that of millions!
He comes, my king, unconscious of his fortune.

Enter TANCRED.

Tan. My Lord Siffredi, in your looks I read,
Confirm'd, the mournful news that fly abroad
From tongue to tongue—We then, at last, have lost
The good old king?

Sif. Yes, we have lost a father! 170
The greatest blessing Heav'n bestows on mortals,
“And seldom found amidst these wilds of time.”
A good, a worthy king!—Hear me, my Tancred,
And I will tell thee, in a few plain words,
How he deserv'd that best, that glorious title.
“'Tis nought complex, 'tis clear as truth and virtue.”
He lov'd his people, deem'd them all his children;
The good exalted, and depress'd the bad.

“ He spurn’d the flatt’ring crew, with scorn rejected
“ Their smooth advice that only means themselves, 180
“ Their schemes to aggrandize him into baseness ;
“ Nor did he less disdain the secret breath,
“ The whisper’d tale, that blights a virtuous name.”

He sought alone the good of those for whom
He was entrusted with the sovereign power :
Well knowing that a people in their rights
And industry protected ; living safe
Beneath the sacred shelter of the laws,
“ Encourag’d in their genius, arts, and labours,
“ And happy each as he himself deserves,” 190
Are ne’er ungrateful. With unsparing hand
They will for him provide : their filial love
And confidence are his unfailing treasure,
And every honest man his faithful guard.

Tan. A general face of grief o’erspreads the city.
I mark’d the people, as I hither came,
In crowds assembled, struck with silent sorrow,
And pouring forth the noblest praise of tears.
“ Those, whom remembrance of their former woes,
“ And long experience of the vain illusions 200
“ O youthful hope, had into wise consent
“ And fear of change corrected, wrung their hands,
“ And, often casting up their eyes to heav’n,
“ Gave sign of sad conjecture. Others shew’d,
“ Athwart their grief, or real or affected,
“ A gleam of expectation, from what chance
“ And change might bring.” A mingled murmur ran
Along the streets, and from the lonely court
Of him who can no more assist their fortunes,
I saw the courtier-fry, with eager haste, 210
All hurrying to Constantia.

Sif. Noble youth !

I joy to hear from thee these just reflections,
Worthy of riper years—Put if they seek
Constantia, trust me, they mistake their course.

Tan. How ! Is she not, my lord, the late king's sister,
Heir to the crown of Sicily ? the last
Of our fam'd Norman line, and now our queen ?

Sif. Tancred, 'tis true ; she is the late king's sister,
The sole surviving offspring of that tyrant 220
William the Bad—" so for his vices stil'd ;

" Who spilt much noble blood, and sore oppress'd
" Th' exhausted land : whence grievous wars arose,
" And many a dire convulsion shook the state.
" When he, whose death Sicilia mourns to-day,
" William, who has and well deserv'd the name
" Of Good, succeeding to his father's throne,
" Reliev'd his country's woes—But to return ;
" She is the late king's sister," born some months
After the tyrant's death, but not next heir. 230

Tan. You much surprise me—May I then presume
To ask who is ?

Sif. Come nearer, noble Tancred,
Son of my care. I must, on this occasion,
Consult thy generous heart ; which, when conducted
By rectitude of mind and honest virtues,
Gives better counsel than the hoary head—
Then know, there lives a prince, here in Palermo,
The lineal offspring of our famous hero,
Roger the First. 240

Tan. Great Heav'n ! How far remov'd
From that our mighty founder ?

Sif. His great grandson :

Sprung from his eldest son, who died untimely,
Before his father.

Tan. Ha ! the prince you mean,
Is he not Manfred's son ? The generous, brave,
Unhappy Manfred ! whom the tyrant William,
You just now mention'd, not content to spoil
Of his paternal crown, threw into fetters, 250
And infamously murder'd ?

Sif. Yes, the same.

Tan. " By heavens, I joy to find our Norman reign,
" The world's sole light amidst these barbarous ages,
" Yet rears its head ; and shall not, from the lance,
" Pass to the feeble distaff."—But this prince,
Where has he lain conceal'd ?

Sif. The late good king,
By noble pity mov'd, contriv'd to save him
From his dire father's unrelenting rage, 260
And had him rear'd in private, as became
His birth and hopes, with high and princely nurture,
Till now, too young to rule a troubled state,
By civil broils, most miserably torn,
He in his safe retreat has lain conceal'd,
His birth and fortune to himself unknown ;
But when the dying king to me intrusted,
As to the chancellor of the realm, his will,
His successor he nam'd him.

Tan. Happy youth ! 270
He then will triumph o'er his father's foes,
O'er haughty Osmond, and the tyrant's daughter.

Sif. Ay, that is what I dread—that heat of youth ;
There lurks, I fear, perdition to the state.
I dread the horrors of rekindled war :
Though dead, the tyrant still is to be fear'd ;

His daughter's party still is strong and numerous :
 Her friend, Earl Osmond, constable of Sicily,
 Experienc'd, brave, high-born, of mighty interest.
 Better the prince and princess should by marriage 280
 Unite their friends, their interest, and their claims !
 Then will the peace and welfare of the land
 On a firm basis rise.

Tan. My Lord Siffredi,
 If by myself I of this prince may judge,
 That scheme will scarce succeed—Your prudent age
 In vain will counsel, if the heart forbid it—
 But wherefore fear ? The right is clearly his ;
 “ And under your direction, with each man
 “ Of worth, and stedfast loyalty, to back 290
 “ At once the king's appointment and his birthright,
 “ There is no ground for fear. They have great odds,
 “ Against th' astonished sons of violence,
 “ Who fight with awful justice on their side.”
 All Sicily will rouse, all faithful hearts,
 Will range themselves around Prince Manfred's son.
 For me, I here devote me to the service
 Of this young prince ; I every drop of blood
 Will lose with joy, with transport in his cause—
 “ Pardon my warmth—but that, my lord, will never 300
 “ To this decision come”—Then find the prince ;
 Lose not a moment to awaken in him
 The royal soul. Perhaps he, now desponding,
 Pines in a corner, and laments his fortune ;
 That in the narrower bounds of private life
 He must confine his aims, those swelling virtues
 Which from his noble father he inherits.

Sif. Perhaps, regardless, in the common bane
 Of youth he melts, in vanity and love.

But if the seeds of virtue glow within him, 310
I will awake a higher sense, a love
That grasps the loves and happiness of millions.

Tan. Why that surmise ? Or should he love, Siffredi,
I doubt not, it is nobly, which will raise
And animate his virtues—Oh, permit me
To plead the cause of youth—Their virtue oft,
In pleasure's soft enchantment lull'd a while,
Forgets itself ; it sleeps and gayly dreams,
Till great occasion rouse it ; then, all flame,
It walks abroad, with heighten'd soul and vigour, 320
And by the change astonishes the world.

“ Even with a kind of sympathy, I feel
“ The joy that waits this prince ; when all the powers,
“ Th' expanding heart can wish, of doing good ;
“ Whatever swells ambition, or exalts
“ The human soul into divine emotions,
“ All crowd at once upon him.

“ *Sif.* Ah, my Tancred,
“ Nothing so easy as in speculation,
“ And at a distance seen, the course of honour, 330
“ A fair delightful champain strew'd with flowers.
“ But when the practice comes ; when our fond passions,
“ Pleasure and pride, and self-indulgence, throw,
“ Their magic dust around, the prospect roughens ;
“ Then dreadful passes, craggy mountains rise,
“ Cliffs to be scal'd, and torrents to be stem'd ;
“ Then toil ensues, and perseverance stern ;
“ And endless combats with our grosser sense,
“ Oft lost, and oft renew'd ; and generous pain
“ For others felt ; and, harder lesson still ! 340
“ Our honest bliss for others sacrific'd ;
“ And all the rugged task of virtue quells

“ The stoutest heart of common resolution.

“ Few get above this turbid scene of strife.

“ Few gain the summit, breathe that purest air,

“ That heavenly ether, which untroubled sees

“ The storm of vice and passion rage below.

“ *Tan.* Most true, my lord. But why thus augur ill ?

“ You seem to doubt this prince. I know him not.

“ Yet, oh, methinks, my heart could answer for him ! 350

“ The juncture is so high, so strong the gale

“ That blows from Heaven, as through the dearest soul

“ Might breathe the godlike energy of virtue.”

Sif. Hear him, immortal shades of his great fathers !—
Forgive me, sir, this trial of your heart.

Thou ! thou, art he !

Tan. Siffredi !

Sif. Tancred, thou !

Thou art the man of all the many thousands

That toil upon the besom of this isle,

360

By Heaven elected to command the rest,

To rule, protect them, and to make them happy !

Tan. Manfred my father ! I the last support
Of the fam'd Norman line, that awes the world !

I, who this morning wander'd forth an orphan,

Outcast of all but thee, my second father !

Thus call'd to glory ! to the first great lot

Of human kind !—Oh, wonder-working hand,

That, in majestic silence, sways at will

The mighty movements of unbounded nature ;

370

Oh, grant me, Heaven, the virtues to sustain

This awful burden of so many heroes !

Let me not be exalted into shame,

Set up the worthless pageant of vain grandeur.

Meantime I thank the justice of the king,

Who has my right bequeath'd me. Thee Siffredi,
I thank thee—Oh, I ne'er enough can thank thee!
Yes, thou hast been—thou art—shalt be my father!
Thou shalt direct my unexperienc'd years,
Shalt be the ruling head, and I the hand.

380

Sif. It is enough for me—to see my sovereign
Assert his virtues, and maintain his honour.

Tan. I think, my lord, you said the king committed
To you his will. I hope it is not clogg'd
With any base conditions, any clause,
To tyrannize my heart, and to Constantia
Enslave my hand devoted to another.
The hint you just now gave of that alliance,
You must imagine, wakes my fear. But know,
In this alone I will not bear dispute,
Not even from thee, Siffredi!—Let the council
Be strait assembled, and the will there open'd:
Thence issue speedy orders to convene,

390

This day ere noon, the senate: where those barons,
Who now are in Palermo, will attend,
To pay their ready homage to the king,
“ Their rightful king, who claims his native crown,
“ And will not be a king by deeds and parchments.”

Sif. I go, my liege. But once again permit me
To tell you—Now, now is the trying crisis,
That must determine of your future reign.
Oh, with heroic rigour watch your heart!
And to the sovereign duties of the king,
Th' unequall'd pleasures of a god on earth,
Submit the common joys, the common passions,
Nay, even the virtues of the private man.

400

Tan. Of that no more. They, not oppose, but aid,
Invigorate, cherish, and reward each other.

"The kind all-ruling wisdom is no tyrant." [*Exit Siffredi.*

Tan. Now, generous Sigismunda, comes my turn
To shew my love was not of thine unworthy, 410
When fortune bade me blush to look to thee.
But what is fortune to the wish of love?
A miserable bankrupt! "Oh, 'tis poor,
" 'Tis scanty all, whate'er we can bestow!
"The wealth of kings is wretchedness and want!"
Quick, let me find her! taste that highest joy,
Th' exalted heart can know, the mix'd effusion
Of gratitude and love!—Behold, she comes!

Enter SIGISMUNDA.

Tan. My fluttering soul was all on wing to find thee, 420
My love, my Sigismunda!

Sig. Oh, my Tancred!
Tell me, what means this mystery and gloom
That lowers around? Just now, involv'd in thought,
My father shot athwart me—You, my lord,
Seem strangely mov'd—I fear some dark event,
From the king's death to trouble our repose,
That tender calm we in the woods of Belmont
So happily enjoy'd—Explain this hurry,
What means it? Say. 430

Tan. It means that we are happy!
Beyond our most romantic wishes happy!

Sig. You but perplex me more.

Tan. It means, my fairest,
That thou art queen of Sicily; and I
The happiest of mankind! "than monarch more!"
Because with thee I can adorn my throne.
Manfred, who fell by tyrant William's rage,
Fam'd Roger's lineal issue, was my father.

[*Pausing.*

You droop, my love ; dejected on a sudden ;
 You seem to mourn my fortune—The soft tear
 Springs in thy eye—Oh, let me kiss it off—
 Why this, my Sigismunda ?

440

Sig. Royal Tancred,
 None at your glorious fortune can like me
 Rejoice ;—yet me alone, of all Sicilians,
 It makes unhappy.

Tan. I should hate it then !
 Should throw, with scorn, the splendid ruin from me !—
 No, Sigismunda, 'tis my hope with thee
 To share it, whence it draws its richest value.

450

Sig. You are my sovereign—I at humble distance—

Tan. Thou art my queen ! the sovereign of my soul !

“ You never reign'd with such triumphant lustre,
 “ Such winning charms as now ; yet, thou art still”
 The dear, the tender, generous Sigismunda !

“ Who, with a heart exalted far above
 “ Those selfish views that charm the common breast,
 “ Stoop'd from the height of life and courted beauty,
 “ Then, then, to love me, when I seem'd of fortune

460

“ The hopeless outcast, when I had no friend,
 “ None to protect and own me, but thy father.
 “ And wouldst thou claim all goodness to thyself ?
 “ Canst thou thy Tancred deem so dully forin'd,
 “ Of such gross clay, just as I reach'd the point—
 “ A point my wildest hopes could ne'er imagine—
 “ In that great moment, full of every virtue,
 “ That I should then so mean a traitor prove
 “ To the best bliss and honour of mankind,
 “ So much disgrace the human heart, as then,
 “ For the dead form of flattery and pomp,
 “ The faithless joys of courts, to quit kind truth,

470

" The cordial sweets of friendship and of love,
 " The life of life ! my all, my Sigismunda !
 " I could upbraid thy fears, call them unkind,
 " Cruel, unjust, an outrage to my heart,
 " Did they not spring from love.

Sig. " Think not, my lord,

" That to such vulgar doubts I can descend."
 Your heart, I know, disdains the little thought
 Of changing with the vain, external change
 Of circumstance and fortune. " Rather thence
 " It would, with rising ardour, greatly feel
 " A noble pride, to shew itself the same."
 But, ah ! the hearts of kings are not their own.
 " There is a haughty duty that subjects them
 " To chains of state, to wed the public welfare,
 " And not indulge the tender, private virtues."

Some high-descended princess, who will bring
 New power and interest to your throne, demands
 Your royal hand ——— perhaps Constantia ———

Tan. She !

Oh, name her not ! were I this moment free
 And disengag'd as he who " never felt.
 " The powerful eye of beauty," never sigh'd
 For matchless worth like thine, I should abhor
 All thoughts of that alliance. Her fell father
 Most basely murder'd mine ; and she, his daughter,
 " Supported by his barbarous party still,
 " His pride inherits, his imperious spirit,
 " And insolent pretensions to my throne."
 And canst thou deem me, then, so poorly tame,
 So cool a traitor to my father's blood,
 As from the prudent cowardice of state
 E'er to submit to such a base proposal ?

480

490

500

“ Detested thought! Oh, doubly, doubly hateful!
 “ From the two strongest passions; from aversion,
 “ To this Constantia—and from love to thee.
 “ Custom, ’tis true, a venerable tyrant,
 “ O’er servile man extends a blind dominion :
 “ The pride of kings enslaves them; their ambition
 “ Or interest, lords it o’er the better passions.
 “ But vain their talk, mask’d under specious words
 “ Of station, duty, and of public good.”

510

They whom just Heaven has to a throne exalted,
 To guard the rights and liberties of others,
 What duty binds them to betray their own!
 “ For me, my free-born heart shall bear no dictates,
 “ But those of truth and honour; wear no chains,
 “ But the dear chains of love, and Sigismunda!”

520

Or if indeed my choice must be directed
 By views of public good, whom shall I choose
 So fit to grace, to dignify a crown,
 And beam sweet mercy on a happy people,
 As thee, my love? Whom place upon my throne
 But thee, descended from the good Siffredi?
 “ ’Tis fit that heart be thine which drew from him
 “ Whate’er can make it worthy thy acceptance.”

Sig. Cease, cease to raise my hopes above my duty.

Charin me no more, my Tancred!—Oh, that we
 In those blest woods, where first you won my soul,
 Had pass’d our gentle days: far from the toil
 And pomp of courts! Such is the wish of love;
 “ Of love that, with delightful weakness, knows
 “ No bliss, and no ambition but itself.
 “ But in the world’s full light, those charming dreams,
 “ Those fond illusions vanish. Awful duties!
 “ The tyranny of men, even your own heart,

530

“ Where lurks a sense your passion stifles now,
 “ And proud imperious honour call you from me.” 540
 ’Tis all in vain—you cannot hush a voice
 That murmurs here—I must not be persuaded!

Tan. [*Kneeling.*] Hear me, thou soul of all my hopes and wishes!

And witness Heaven, prime source of love and joy!
 Not a whole warring world combin’d against me;
 “ Its pride, its splendor, its imposing forms,
 “ Nor interest, nor ambition, nor the face
 “ Of solemn state, not even thy father’s wisdom,”
 Shall ever shake my faith to Sigismunda!

[*Trumpets and acclamations heard.*]

But, hark! the public voice to duty calls me, 550
 Which with unwearied zeal I will discharge;
 And thou, yes, thou, shalt be my bright reward—
 Yet—ere I go—to hush thy lovely fears,
 Thy delicate objections—[*Writes his name.*]—Take this blank,
 Sign’d with my name, and give it to thy father:
 Tell him, ’tis my command, it be fill’d up
 With a most strict and solemn marriage-contract.
 How dear each tie! how charming to my soul!
 That more unites me to my Sigismunda.

For thee, and for my people’s good to live, 560
Is all the bliss which sovereign power can give. [*Exeunt.*]

ACT II. SCENE I.

A grand Saloon. Enter SIFFREDI.

Siffredi.

So far ’tis well—The late king’s will proceeds
 Upon the plan I counsell’d; that Prince Tancred

Shall make Constantia partner of his throne.
 Oh, great, oh, wish'd event! "whence the dire seeds
 "Of dark intestine broils, of civil war,
 "And all its dreadful miseries and crimes,
 "Shall be for ever rooted from the land.
 "May these dim eyes, long blasted by the rage
 "Of cruel faction and my country's woes,
 "Tir'd with the toils and vanities of life, 10
 "Behold this period, then be clos'd in peace!"
 But how this mighty obstacle surmount,
 Which love has thrown betwixt? "Love, that disturbs
 "The schemes of wisdom still; that, wing'd with passion,
 "Blind and impetuous in its fond pursuits,
 "Leaves the grey-headed reason far behind.
 "Alas, how frail the state of human bliss!
 "When even our honest passions oft destroy it.
 "I was to blame, in solitude and shades,
 "Infectious scenes! to trust their youthful hearts. 20
 "Would I had mark'd the rising flame, that now
 "Burns out with dangerous force!"—My daughter owns
 Her passion for the king; she trembling own'd it,
 With prayers, and tears, and tender supplications,
 That almost shook my firmness—And this blank,
 Which his rash fondness gave her, shews how much,
 To what a wild extravagance he loves—
 I see no means—it foils my deepest thought—
 How to controul this madness of the king,
 That wears the face of virtue, and will thence 30
 Disdain restraint, "will, from his generous heart,
 "Borrow new rage, even speciously oppose
 "To reason reason"—But it must be done.
 "My own advice, of which I more and more
 "Approve, the strict conditions of the will,

“ Highly demand his marriage with Constantia ;
“ Or else her party has a fair pretence——
“ And all at once is horror and confusion——
“ How issue from this maze ? ”——The crowding barons
Here summon’d to the palace, meet already, 40
To pay their homage, and confirm the will.
On a few moments hang the public fate,
On a few hasty moments——Ha ! there shone
A gleam of hope——Yes, with this very paper
I yet will save him——“ Necessary means,
“ For good and noble ends, can ne’er be wrong.
“ In that resistless, that peculiar case,
“ Deceit is truth and virtue——But how hold
“ This lion in the toil ?——Oh, I will form it
“ Of such a fatal thread, twist it so strong 50
“ With all the ties of honour and of duty,
“ That his most desperate fury shall not break
“ The honest snare.”——Here is the royal hand—
I will beneath it write a perfect, full,
And absolute agreement to the will ;
Which read before the nobles of the realm
Assembled, in the sacred face of Sicily,
Constantia present, every heart and eye
Fix’d on their monarch, every tongue applauding,
He must submit, his dream of love must vanish— 60
It shall be done——To me, I know, ’tis ruin ;
But safety to the public, to the king.
I will not reason more, “ I will not listen
“ Even to the voice of honour.”——No—’tis fix’d !
I here devote me for my prince and country ;
Let them be safe, and let me nobly perish !
Behold, Earl Osmond comes, without whose aid
My schemes are all in vain.

Enter OSMOND.

Osm. My Lord Siffredi,
I from the council hasten'd to Constantia,
And have accomplish'd what we there propos'd. 70
The princess to the will submits her claims.
She with her presence means to grace the senate,
And of your royal charge, young Tancred's hand,
Accept. "At first, indeed, it shock'd her hopes
"Of reigning sole, this new, surprising scene
"Of Manfred's son, appointed by the king,
"With her joint heir—But I so fully shew'd
"The justice of the case, the public good,
"And sure establish'd peace which thence would rise, 80
"Join'd to the strong necessity that urg'd her,
"If on Sicilia's throne she meant to sit,
"As to the wise disposal of the will
"Her high ambition tam'd." Methought, besides,
I could discern, that not from prudence merely
She to this choice submitted.

Sif. Noble Osmond,
You have in this done to the public great
And signal service. Yes, I must avow it;
This frank and ready instance of your zeal, 90
In such a trying crisis of the state,
"When interest and ambition might have warp'd
"Your views, I own this truly generous virtue"
Upbraids the rashness of my former judgment.

Osm. Siffredi, no. To you belongs the praise;
"The glorious work is yours. Had I not seiz'd,
"Improv'd the wish'd occasion to root out
"Division from the land, and sav'd my country,

" I had been base, been infamous for ever."

'Tis you, my lord, to whom the many thousands

100

That by the barbarous sword of civil war

Had fallen inglorious, owe their lives ; " to you

" The sons of this fair isle, from her first peers

" Down to the swain who tills her golden plains,

" Owe their safe homes, their soft domestic hours,

" And through late time posterity shall bless you,

" You who advis'd this will."—I blush to think

I have so long oppos'd the best good man

In Sicily—" With what impartial care

" Ought we to watch o'er prejudice and passion,

110

" Nor trust too much the jaundic'd eye of party !

" Henceforth its vain delusions I renounce,

" Its hot determinations, that confine

" All merit and all virtue to itself."

To yours I join my hand ; with you will own

No interest and no party but my country.

Nor is your friendship only my ambition ;

There is a dearer name, the name of father,

By which I should rejoice to call Siffredi.

Your daughter's hand would to the public weal

120

Unite my private happiness.

Sif. My lord,

You have my glad consent. To be allied

To your distinguish'd family and merit,

I shall esteem an honour. From my soul

I here embrace Earl Osmond as my friend

And son.

Osm. You make him happy. This assent,

" So frank and warm, to what I long have wish'd,

" Engages all my gratitude ; at once,

130

" In the first blossom, it matures our friendship."

I from this moment vow myself the friend
And zealous servant of Siffredi's house.

Enter an Officer belonging to the Court.

Off. [*To Siffredi.*] The king, my lord, demands your
speedy presence.

Sif. I will attend him strait—Farewell, my lord ;
The senate meets : there, a few moments hence,
I will rejoin you.

Osm. There, my noble lord,
We will complete this salutary work ;
Will there begin a new auspicious era.

140

[*Exeunt Siffredi and Officer.*]

Siffredi gives his daughter to my wishes—
But does she give herself? Gay, young, and flatter'd,
Perhaps engag'd, will she her youthful heart
Yield to my harsher, uncomplying years?
I am not form'd, by flattery and praise,
By sighs and tears, and all the whining trade
Of love, to feed a fair-one's vanity ;
To charm at once and spoil her. These soft arts
Nor suit my years nor temper ; these be left
To boys and doting age. A prudent father,
By nature charg'd to guide and rule her choice,
Resigns his daughter to a husband's power,
Who with superior dignity, with reason,
And manly tenderness, will ever love her ;
Not first a kneeling slave, and then a tyrant.

150

“ Enter Barons.

“ My lords, I greet you well. This wondrous day
“ Unites us all in amity and friendship.
“ We meet to-day with open hearts and looks,

- “ Not gloom’d by party, scowling on each other,
“ But all the children of one happy isle, 160
“ The social sons of liberty. No pride,
“ No passion now, no thwarting views divide us :
“ Prince Manfred’s line, at last to William’s join’d,
“ Combine us in one family of brothers.
“ This to the late good king’s well-order’d will,
“ And wise Siffredi’s generous care, we owe.
“ I truly give you joy. First of you all,
“ I here renounce those errors and divisions
“ That have so long disturb’d our peace, and seem’d,
“ Fermenting still, to threaten new commotions—— 170
“ By time instructed, let us not disdain
“ To quit mistakes. We all, my lords, have err’d.
“ Men may, I find, be honest, though they differ.
“ *1st Baron.* Who follows not, my lord, the fair example
“ You set us all, whate’er be his pretence,
“ Loves not, with single and unbiass’d heart,
“ His country as he ought.
“ *2nd Baron.* Oh, beauteous peace !
“ Sweet union of a state ! what else but thou
“ Gives safety, strength, and glory to a people ? 180
“ I bow, lord constable, beneath the snow
“ Of many years ; yet in my breast revives
“ A youthful flame. Methinks, I see again
“ Those gentle days renew’d, that bless’d our isle,
“ Ere by this wasteful fury of division,
“ Worse than our Ætna’s most destructive fires,
“ It desolated sunk. I see our plains
“ Unbounded waving with the gifts of harvest ;
“ Our seas with commerce throng’d ; our busy ports
“ With cheerful toil. Our Enna blooms afresh ; 190
“ Afresh the sweets of thymy Hybla flow.

“ Our nymphs and shepherds sporting in each vale,
 “ Inspire new song, and wake the pastoral reed—
 “ The tongue of age is fond—Come, come, my sons ;
 “ I long to see this prince, of whom the world
 “ Speaks largely well—His father was my friend,
 “ The brave unhappy Manfred—Come, my lords ;
 “ We tarry here too long.

“ *Enter two Officers keeping off the Crowd.*

“ *One of the Crowd.* Shew us our king,
 “ The valiant Manfred’s son, who lov’d the people— 200
 “ We must, we will behold him—Give us way.
 “ *1st Off.* Pray, gentlemen, give back—it must not be—
 “ Give back, I pray—on such a glad occasion,
 “ I would not ill entreat the lowest of you.

“ *2d Man of the Crowd.* Nay, give us but a glimpse of our
 young king.

“ We, more than any Baron of them all,
 “ Will pay him due allegiance.

“ *2nd Off.* Friends—indeed
 “ You cannot pass this way—We have strict orders,
 “ To keep for him himself, and for the Barons, 210
 “ All these apartments clear—Go to the gate
 “ That fronts the sea, you there will find admission.

“ *All.* Long live king Tancred ! Manfred’s son—huzza !
 [Crowd goes off.]

Enter 1st Officer.

1st Off. My lord, the king is rob’d, the senate sits,
 And waits your presence. [Exeunt Osmond and Barons.
 [Shouts within.]

Enter 2nd Officer.

2nd Off. I have not seen
 So wild a tumult ; the town is mad with transport ;

*Show us our king, they cry, our Norman king,
The valiant Manfred's son, who lov'd the people.
In vain I told 'em, that we had strict orders
To keep for him himself, and for the Barons,
All these apartments clear. Nought could
Appease their storm of zeal; till at
The northern gate, that fronts the sea,
I promis'd them admittance.*

220

1st Off. I do not marvel at their rage of joy :
He is a brave and amiable prince.
When in my Lord Siffredi's house I liv'd,
Ere by his favour I obtain'd this office,
I there remember well the young Count Tancred.
To see him and to love him were the same ;
He was so noble in his ways, yet still
So affable and mild——Well, well, old Sicily,
Yet happy days await thee !

230

2nd Off. Grant it, Heaven !
“ We have seen sad and troublesome times enough.”
He is, they say, to wed the late king's sister,
Constantia.

1st Off. Friend, of that I greatly doubt.
Or I mistake, or Lord Siffredi's daughter,
The gentle Sigismunda, has his heart.
If one may judge by kindly cordial looks,
And fond assiduous care to please each other,
Most certainly they love——Oh, be they blest,
As they deserve ! It were great pity aught
Should part a matchless pair ; the glory he,
And she the blooming grace of Sicily !

240

2nd Off. My Lord Rodolpho comes.

Enter RODOLPHO from the Senate.

Rod. My honest friends,
 You may retire. [*Officers go out.*] A storm is in the wind.
 This will perplexes all. No, Tancred never 251
 Can stoop to these conditions, which at once
 Attack his rights, his honour, and his love.
 " Those wise old men, those plodding, grave, state pedants,
 " Forget the course of youth ; their crooked prudence,
 " To haseness verging still, forgets to take
 " Into their fine-spun schemes the generous heart,
 " That, through the cobweb-system bursting, lays
 " Their labours waste—So will this business prove,
 " Or I mistake the king—back from the pomp 260
 " He seem'd at first to shrink, and round his brow
 " I mark'd a gathering cloud, when, by his side,
 " As if design'd to share the public homage,
 " He saw the tyrant's daughter. But confess'd,
 " At least to me the doubling tempest frown'd,
 " And shook his swelling bosom," when he heard
 Th' unjust, the base conditions of the will.
 Uncertain, tost in cruel agitation,
 He oft, methought, address'd himself to speak,
 And interrupt Siffredi ; who appear'd, 270
 With conscious haste, to dread that interruption,
 And hurry'd on——But hark ! I hear a noise,
 As if th' assembly rose—" Ha ! Sigismunda,
 " Opprest with grief, and wrapt in pensive sorrow,
 " Passes along.

" [*Sigismunda and attendants pass through the back scene.*"]

Enter LAURA.

Laura. Your high-prais'd friend, the king,

Is false, most vilely false. The meanest slave
Had shewn a nobler heart; "nor grossly thus,
" By the first bait ambition spread, been gull'd."
He Manfred's son! away! it cannot be! 280
The son of that brave prince could ne'er "betray
" Those rights so long usurp'd from his great father,
" Which he, this day, by such amazing fortune,
" Had just regain'd; he ne'er could" sacrifice
All faith, all honour, gratitude, and love,
" Even just resentment of his father's fate,
" And pride itself; whate'er exalts a man
" Above the groveling sons of peasant mud,"
All in a moment—And for what? why, truly,
For kind permission, gracious leave, to sit 290
On his own throne with tyrant William's daughter!

Rod. I stand amaz'd—You surely wrong him, Laura.
There must be some mistake.

Laura. There can be none!
Siffredi read his full and free consent
Before th' applauding senate. True indeed,
A small remain of shame, a timorous weakness,
Even dastardly in falsehood, made him blush
To act this scene in Sigismunda's eye,
Who sunk beneath his perfidy and baseness. 300
Hence, till to-morrow he adjourn'd the senate!
To-morrow, fix'd with infamy to crown him!
Then, leading off his gay, triumphant princess,
He left the poor unhappy Sigismunda
To bend her trembling steps to that sad home
His faithless vows will render hateful to her——
He comes—Farewell—I cannot bear his presence!

[*Exit Laura.*]

Enter TANCRED and SIFFREDI, meeting.

Tan. Avoid me, hoary traitor ! Go, Rodolpho,
Give orders that all passages this way
Be shut—Defend me from a hateful world, 310
The bane of peace and honour—then return—

[Exit Rodolpho.]

What ! dost thou haunt me still ? Oh, monstrous insult !
Unparallell'd indignity ! Just Heaven !
Was ever king, was ever man so treated ;
So trampled into baseness ?

Sif. Here, my liege,
Here strike ! I nor deserve, nor ask for mercy.

“ *Tan.* Distraction !—Oh, my soul !—Hold, reason, hold
“ Thy giddy seat—Oh, this inhuman outrage
“ Unhinges thought ! 320

“ *Sif.* Exterminate thy servant.”

Tan. All, all but this I could have borne—but this !
This daring insolence beyond example !
This murderous stroke, that stabs my peace for ever !
That wounds me there—there ! where the human heart
Most exquisitely feels——

Sif. Oh, bear it not,
My royal lord ; appease on me your vengeance !

Tan. Did ever tyrant image aught so cruel !
The lowest slave that crawls upon the earth, 330
Robb'd of each comfort Heaven bestows on mortals,
On the bare ground has still his virtue left,
The sacred treasure of an honest heart,
Which thou hast dar'd, with rash, audacious hand,
And impious fraud, in me to violate——

Sif. Behold, my lord, that rash, audacious hand,
Which not repents its crime—Oh, glorious, happy !
If by my ruin I can save your honour.

Tan. Such honour I renounce ; with sovereign scorn
Greatly detest it, and its mean adviser ! 340

Hast thou not dar'd beneath my name to shelter,

“ My name, for other purposes design'd,

“ Given from the fondness of a faithful heart,

“ With the best love o'erflowing !—Hast thou not”

Beneath thy sovereign's name, basely presum'd

To shield a lie—a lie, in public utter'd,

To all deluded Sicily ? But know,

This poor contrivance is as weak as base.

“ In such a wretched toil none can be held

“ But fools and cowards—Soon thy flimsy arts, 350

“ Touch'd by my just, my burning indignation,

“ Shall burst like threads in flame—Thy doting prudence

“ But more secures the purpose it would shake.

“ Had my resolves been wavering and doubtful,

“ This would confirm them, make them fix'd as fate ;

“ This adds the only motive that was wanting

“ To urge them on through war and desolation.”

What ! marry her ! Constantia ! her ! the daughter

Of the fell tyrant who destroy'd my father !

The very thought is madness ! Ere thou seest 360

The torch of Hymen light these hated nuptials,

Thou shalt behold Sicilia wrapt in flames,

Her cities raz'd, her vallies drench'd with slaughter—

Love set aside, my pride assumes the quarrel ;

My honour now is up ; in spite of thee,

A world combin'd against me, I will give

This scatter'd will in fragments to the winds,

Assert my rights, the freedom of my heart,

Crush all who dare oppose me to the dust,

And heap perdition on thee ! 370

Sif. Sir, 'tis just.

Exhaust on me your rage ; I claim it all.

But for these public threats thy passion utters,
'Tis what thou canst not do.

Tan. I cannot! ha!

“ Driven to the dreadful brink of such dishonour,
“ Enough to make the tamest coward brave,
“ And into fierceness rouse the mildest nature,”
What shall arrest my vengeance? Who?

Sif. Thyself.

380

Tan. Away! Dare not to justify thy crime!
That, that alone can aggravate its horror,
Add insolence to insolence——perhaps
May make my rage forget——

Sif. Oh, let it burst

On this grey head, devoted to thy service!
But when the storm has vented all its fury,
Thou then must hear—nay more, I know thou wilt—
Wilt hear the calm, yet stronger voice of reason.

“ Thou must reflect that a whole people’s safety,
“ The weal of trusted millions, should bear down,
“ Thyself the judge, the fondest partial pleasure.”

390

Thou must reflect that there are other duties,
“ A nobler pride, a more exalted honour,
“ Superior pleasures far, that will oblige,
“ Compel thee, to abide by this my deed,
“ Unwarranted perhaps in common justice,
“ But which necessity, ev’n virtue’s tyrant,
“ With awful voice commanded?”—Yes, thou must,
In calmer hours, divest thee of thy love,
These common passions of the vulgar breast,
This boiling heat of youth, and be a king,
The lover of thy people!

400

Tan. “ Truths, ill employ’d,
“ Abus’d to colour guilt!——A king! a king!”

Yes, I will be a king, but not a slave ;
 In this will be a king ; in this my people
 Shall learn to judge how I will guard their rights,
 When they behold me vindicate my own.
 But have I, say, been treated like a king !—
 Heavens ! could I stoop to such outrageous usage !
 I were a mean, a shameless wretch, unworthy
 To wield a sceptre in a land of slaves,
 A soil abhorr'd of virtue ; should belie
 My father's blood, belie those very maxims,
 At other times you taught my youth—Siffredi !

410

[In a softened tone of voice.]

Sif. Behold, my prince, thy poor old servant,
 Whose darling care, these twenty years, has been
 To nurse thee up to virtue ; “ who, for thee,
 “ Thy glory and thy weal, renounces all,
 “ All interest or ambition can pour forth ;
 “ What many a selfish father would pursue
 “ Through treachery and crimes :” behold him here,
 Bent on his feeble knees, to beg, conjure thee,
 With tears to beg thee to controul thy passion,
 And save thyself, thy honour, and thy people !
 Kneeling with me, behold the many thousands
 To thy protection trusted ; fathers, mothers,
 The sacred front of venerable age,
 The tender virgin, and the helpless infant :
 “ The ministers of Heav'n, those who maintain,
 “ Around thy throne, the majesty of rule ;
 “ And those whose labour, scorch'd by winds and sun,
 “ Feeds the rejoicing public ;” see them all
 Here at thy feet conjuring thee to save them
 From misery and war, from crimes and rapine !
 “ Can there be aught, kind Heaven, in self-indulgence

420

430

" To weigh down these, this aggregate of love,
 " With which compar'd, the dearest private passion
 " Is but the wafted dust upon the balance!"

440

Turn not away—Oh, is there not some part
 In thy great heart so sensible to kindness,
 And generous warmth, some nobler part, to feel
 The prayers and tears of these, the mingled voice
 Of heaven and earth?

Tan. There is, and thou hast touch'd it.
 Rise, rise, Siffredi—Oh, thou hast undone me!
 Unkind old man!—Oh, ill-entreated Tancred!
 Which way so'er I turn, dishonour rears
 Her hideous front—and misery and ruin.

450

" Was it for this you took such care to form me!
 " For this imbu'd me with the quickest sense
 " Of shame; these finer feelings, that ne'er vex
 " The common mass of mortals, dully happy
 " In bless'd insensibility! Oh, rather
 " You should have sear'd my heart, taught me that power
 " And splendid interest, lord it still o'er virtue;
 " That, gilded by prosperity and pride,
 " There is no shame, no meanness; temper'd thus,
 " I had been fit to rule a venal world.

460

" Alas! what meant thy wantonness of prudence?"

Why have you rais'd this miserable conflict
 Betwixt the duties of the king and man?

Set virtue against virtue?—" Ah, Siffredi!

" 'Tis thy superfluous, thy unfeeling wisdom,

" That has involv'd me in a maze of error

" Almost beyond retreat"—But hold, my soul,

Thy steady purpose—Tost by various passions

To this eternal anchor keep—There is,

Can be no public without private virtue—

470

Then, mark me well, observe what I command ;
“ It is the sole expedient now remaining”——
To-morrow, when the senate meets again,
Unfold the whole, unravel the deceit ;
“ Nor that alone ; try to repair its mischief ;
“ There all thy power, thy eloquence and interest
“ Exert to reinstate me in my rights,
“ And from thy own dark snares to disembroil me.”
Start not, my lord—this must and shall be done !
Or here our friendship ends——Howe’er disguis’d, 480
Whatever thy pretence, thou art a traitor.

Sif. I should indeed deserve the name of traitor,
And even a traitor’s fate, had I so slightly,
From principles so weak, done what I did,
As e’er to disavow it——

Tan. Ha !

Sif. My liege,
Expect not this—Though practis’d long in courts,
I have not so far learn’d their subtle trade,
To veer obedient with each gust of passion. 490
I honour thee, I venerate thy orders,
But honour more my duty. Nought on earth
Shall ever shake me from that solid rock,
Nor smiles, nor frowns.——

Tan. You will not then ?

Sif. I cannot.

Tan. Away ! begone !—Oh, my Rodolpho, come,
And save me from this traitor ! Hence, I say.

“ Avoid my presence strait ! and know, old man,
“ Thou, my worst foe beneath the mask of friendship, 500
“ Who, not content to trample in the dust
“ My dearest rights, dost with cool insolence
“ Persist, and call it duty ; hadst thou not

" A daughter that protects thee, thou shouldst feel

" The vengeance thou deservest."—No reply!

Away!

[Exit Siffredi.]

Enter RODOLPHO.

Rod. What can incense my prince so highly
Against his friend Siffredi!

Tan. Friend! Rodolpho?

When I have told thee what this friend has done, 510
How play'd me like a boy, a base-born wretch,
Who had nor heart nor spirit, thou wilt stand
Amaz'd, and wonder at my stupid patience.

" *Rod.* I heard, with mix'd astonishment and grief,
" The king's unjust, dishonourable will,
" Void in itself—I saw you stung with rage,
" And writhing in the snare; just as I went,
" At your command to wait you here—but that
" Was the king's deed, not his.

" *Tan.* Oh, he advis'd it! 520
" These many years he has in secret hatch'd
" This black contrivance, glories in the scheme,
" And proudly plumes him with his traiterous virtue.
" But that was nought, Rodolpho, nothing, nothing!
" Oh, that was gentle, blameless to what follow'd!

" I had, my friend, to Sigismunda given,
" To hush her fears, in the full gush of fondness,
" A blank sign'd with my hand—and he, oh, heavens!
" Was ever such a wild attempt?—he wrote

" Beneath my name an absolute compliance 530
" To this detested will; nay, dar'd to read it
" Before myself, on my insulted throne
" His idle pageant plac'd—Oh, words are weak
" To paint the pangs, the rage, the indignation,

- “ That whirl’d from thought to thought my soul in tempest,
“ Now on the point to burst, and now by shame
“ Repress’d—But in the face of Sicily
“ All mad with acclamation, what, Rodolpho,
“ What could I do? The sole relief that rose
“ To my distracted mind, was to adjourn 540
“ Th’ assembly ’till to-morrow—But to-morrow
“ What can be done!—Oh, it avails not what!
“ I care not what is done—My only care
“ Is how to clear my faith with Sigismunda.
“ She thinks me false! She cast a look that kill’d me!
“ Oh! I am base in Sigismunda’s eye!
“ The lowest of mankind, the most perfidious!
“ *Rod.* This was a strain of insolence indeed,
“ A daring outrage of so strange a nature
“ As stuns me quite—— 550
“ *Tan.* Curs’d be my timid prudence,
“ That dash’d not back, that moment in his face,
“ The bold presumptuous lie!—and curs’d this hand,
“ That from a start of poor dissimulation,
“ Led off my Sigismunda’s hated rival.
“ Ah, then! what, poison’d by the false appearance,
“ What, Sigismunda, were thy thoughts of me?
“ How, in the silent bitterness of soul,
“ How didst thou scorn me! hate mankind, thyself,
“ For trusting to the vows of faithless Tancred? 560
“ For such I seem’d—I was—the thought distracts me!
“ I should have cast a flattering world aside,
“ Rush’d from my throne, before them all avow’d her,
“ The choice, the glory of my free-born heart,
“ And spurn’d the shameful fetters thrown upon it—
“ Instead of that—confusion!—what I did
“ Has clinch’d the chain, confirm’d Siffredi’s crime,
“ And fix’d me down to infamy!

“ *Rod.* My lord,
 “ Blame not the conduct which your situation
 “ Tore from your tortur’d heart—What could you do? 570
 “ Had you, so circumstanc’d, in open senate,
 “ Before th’ astonish’d public, with no friends
 “ Prepar’d, no party form’d, affronted thus
 “ The haughty Princess and her powerful faction,
 “ Supported by this will, the sudden stroke,
 “ Abrupt and premature, might have recoil’d
 “ Upon yourself, even your own friends revolted,
 “ And turn’d at once the public scale against you.
 “ Besides, consider, had you then detected 580
 “ In its fresh guilt this action of Siffredi,
 “ You must with signal vengeance have chastis’d
 “ The treasonable deed—Nothing so mean
 “ As weak insulted power that dares not punish.
 “ And how would that have suited with your love;
 “ His daughter present too? Trust me, your conduct,
 “ Howe’er abhorrent to a heart like yours,
 “ Was fortunate and wise—Not that I mean
 “ E’er to advise submission——

590

Tan. “ Heavens! submission——
 “ Could I descend to bear it, even in thought,
 “ Despise me, you, the world, and Sigismunda!
 “ Submission!—No!—To-morrow’s glorious light
 “ Shall flash discovery on the scene of baseness.
 “ Whatever be the risque, by heavens, to-morrow,
 “ I will o’erturn the dirty lie-built schemes
 “ Of these old men, and shew my faithful senate,
 “ That Manfred’s son knows to assert and wear,
 “ With undiminish’d dignity, that crown
 “ This unexpected day has plac’d upon him.” 600
 But this, my friend, “ these stormy gusts of pride

" Are foreign to my love——Till Sigismunda
 " Be disabus'd, my breast is tumult all,
 " And can obey no settled course of reason.
 " I see her still, I feel her powerful image,
 " That look, where with reproach complaint was mix'd,
 " Big with soft wo, and gentle indignation,
 " Which seem'd at once to pity and to scorn me——
 " Oh, let me find her ! I too long have left
 " My Sigismunda to converse with tears, 610
 " A prey to thoughts that picture me a villain.
 " But ah ! how, clogg'd with this accursed state,
 " A tedious world, shall I now find access ?
 " Her father too—Ten thousand horrors crowd
 " Into the wild, fantastic eye of love——
 " Who knows what he may do ? Come then, my friend
 " And by thy sister's hand, oh, let me steal
 " A letter to her bosom—I no longer
 " Can bear her absence, by the just contempt
 " She now must brand me with, inflam'd to madness. 620
 " Fly, my Rodolpho, fly ! engage thy sister
 " To aid my letter." *This black, unheard of outrage,*
I cannot now impart——'Till Sigismunda
Be disabus'd, my breast is tumult all.
Come, then, my friend, and by the hand of Laura,
Oh, let me steal a letter to her bosom,
 And this "very" evening
 Secure an interview—I would not bear
 This rack another day, not for my kingdom.
 " Till then, deep plung'd in solitude and shades 630
 " I will not see the hated face of man."

Thought drives on thought, on passions passions roll ;
Her smiles alone can calm my raging soul.

[Exeunt.]

ACT III. SCENE I.

A Chamber. SIGISMUNDA alone, sitting in a disconsolate Posture.

AH ! tyrant Prince, ah more than faithless Tancred,
 Ungenerous and inhuman in thy falsehood !
 Hadst thou this morning, when my hopeless heart,
 Submissive to my fortune and my duty,
 Had so much spirit left, as to be willing
 To give thee back thy vows, ah ! hadst thou then
 Confess'd the sad necessity thy state
 Impos'd upon thee, and with gentle friendship,
 Since we must part at last, our parting soften'd ;
 I should indeed—I should have been unhappy,
 But not to this extreme—" Amidst my grief, 10
 " I had, with pensive pleasure, cherish'd still
 " The sweet remembrance of thy former love,
 " Thy image still had dwelt upon my soul,
 " And made our guiltless woes not undelightful.
 " But coolly thus—How couldst thou be so cruel ?—
 " Thus to revive my hopes, to sooth my love,
 " And call forth all its tenderness, then sink me
 " In black despair—What unrelenting pride
 " Possess'd thy breast, that thou couldst bear unmov'd 20
 " To see me bent beneath a weight of shame ?
 " Pangs thou canst never feel ! How couldst thou drag me,
 " In barbarous triumph at a rival's car ?
 " How make me witness to a sight of horror ?
 " That hand, which, but a few short hours ago,
 " So wantonly abus'd my simple faith,
 " Before th' attesting world given to another,

" Irrevocably given !—There was a time,
 " When the least cloud that hung upon my brow,
 " Perhaps imagin'd only, touch'd thy pity. 30
 " Then, brighten'd often by the ready tear,
 " Thy looks were softness all ; then the quick heart,
 " In every nerve alive, forgot itself,
 " And for each other then we felt alone.
 " But now, alas ! those tender days are fled ;
 " Now thou canst see me wretched, pierc'd with anguish,
 " With studied anguish of thy own creating,
 " Nor wet thy harden'd eye—Hold, let me think—
 " I wrong thee sure ; thou canst not be so base,
 " As meanly in my misery to triumph— 40
 " What is it then ?—'Tis fickleness of nature,
 " 'Tis sickly love extinguish'd by ambition——"
 Is there, kind Heaven, no constancy in man ?
 No stedfast truth, no generous fix'd affection,
 That can bear up against a selfish world ?
 No, there is none—Even Tancred is inconstant ! [Rising.
 Hence ! let me fly this scene !—Whate'er I see,
 These roofs, these walls, each object that surrounds me,
 Are tainted with his vows—But whither fly ?
 The groves are worse, the soft retreat of Belmont, 50
 Its deepening glooms, gay lawns, and airy summits,
 Will wound my busy memory to torture,
 And all its shades will whisper—faithless Tancred !—
 My father comes—How, sunk in this disorder,
 Shall I sustain his presence ?

Enter SIFFREDI.

Sif. Sigismunda,
 My dearest child ! I grieve to find thee thus
 A prey to tears. " I know the powerful cause

" From which they flow, and therefore can excuse them,
 " But not their wilful obstinate continuance. 60
 " Come, rouse thee then, call up thy drooping spirit,"
 Awake to reason from this dream of love,
 And shew the world thou art Siffredi's daughter.

Sig. Alas ! I am unworthy of that name.

Sif. Thou art indeed to blame ; thou hast too rashly
 Engag'd thy heart, without a father's sanction.
 But this I can forgive. " The king has virtues,
 " That plead thy full excuse ; nor was I void
 " Of blame, to trust thee to those dangerous virtues.
 " Then dread not my reproaches. Though he blames, 70
 " Thy tender father pities more than blames thee.
 " Thou art my daughter still ;" and, if thy heart
 Will now resume its pride, assert itself,
 And greatly rise superior to this trial,
 I to my warmest confidence again
 Will take thee, and esteem thee more my daughter.

Sig. Oh, you are gentler far than I deserve !
 It is, it ever was, my darling pride,
 To bend my soul to your supreme commands,
 Your wisest will ; and though by love betray'd— 80
 Alas ! and punish'd too—I have transgress'd
 The nicest bounds of duty, yet I feel
 A sentiment of tenderness, a source
 Of filial nature springing in my breast,
 That, should it kill me, shall controul this passion,
 And make me all submission and obedience
 To you my honour'd lord, the best of fathers.

Sif. Come to my arms, thou comfort of my age !
 Thou only joy and hope of these grey hairs !
 Come, let me take thee to a parent's heart ; 90
 There, with the kindly aid of my advice,

Even with the dew of these paternal tears,
 Revive and nourish this becoming spirit—
 Then thou dost promise me, my Sigismunda—
 Thy father stoops to make it his request—
 Thou wilt resign thy fond presumptuous hopes,
 And henceforth never more indulge one thought
 That in the light of love regards the king.

Sig. Hopes I have none!—Those by this fatal day
 Are blasted all—But from my soul to banish,
 While weeping memory there retains her seat,
 Thoughts which the purest bosom might have cherish'd,
 Once my delight, now even in anguish charming,
 Is more, alas! my lord, than I can promise.

100

Sif. Absence, and time, the softener of our passions,
 Will conquer this. Meantime, I hope from thee
 A generous great effort; that thou wilt now
 Exert thy utmost force, nor languish thus
 Beneath the vain extravagance of love.
 Let not thy father blush to hear it said,
 His daughter was so weak, e'er to admit
 A thought so void of reason, that a king
 Should to his rank, his honour, and his glory,
 The high important duties of a throne,
 Even to his throne itself, madly prefer
 A wild romantic passion, the fond child
 Of youthful dreaming thought and vacant hours;
 That he should quit his Heaven-appointed station,
 Desert his awful charge, the care of all
 "The toiling millions which this isle contains;
 "Nay more, should plunge them into war and ruin,
 "And all to sooth a sick imagination,
 "A miserable weakness"—*What*, must for thee,
 To make thee blest, Sicilia be unhappy?

110

120

" The king himself, lost to the nobler sense
 " Of manly praise, become the piteous hero
 " Of some soft tale, and rush on sure destruction?
 " Canst thou, my daughter, let the monstrous thought
 " Possess one moment thy perverted fancy?"

Rouse thee, for shame! and if a spark of virtue 130
 Lies slumb'ring in thy soul, bid it blaze forth;
 Nor sink unequal to the glorious lesson,
 This day thy lover gave thee from his throne.

Sig. Ah, that was not from virtue!—Had, my father,
 That been his aim, I yield to what you say;

" 'Tis powerful truth, unanswerable reason.
 " Then, then, with sad but duteous resignation,
 " I had submitted as became your daughter:
 " But in that moment, when my humbled hopes 140
 " Were to my duty reconcil'd, to raise them
 " To yet a fonder height than e'er they knew,
 " Then rudely dash them down—There is the sting!
 " The blasting view is ever present to me"—
 Why did you drag me to a sight so cruel?

Sif. It was a scene to fire thy emulation.

Sig. It was a scene of perfidy!—But know,
 I will do more than imitate the king—
 For he is false!—I, though sincerely pierc'd
 With the best, truest passion, ever touch'd
 A virgin's breast, here vow to Heaven and you, 150
 Though from my heart I cannot, from my hopes
 To cast this prince—What would you more, my father?

Sif. Yes, one thing more—thy father then is happy—

" Though by the voice of innocence and virtue
 " Absolv'd, we live not to ourselves alone:
 " A rigorous world with peremptory sway,
 " Subjects us all, and ev'n the noblest most."

This world from thee, my honour and thy own,
 Demands one step; a step by which, convinc'd,
 The king may see thy heart disdains to wear 160
 A chain which his has greatly thrown aside,
 " 'Tis fitting too, thy sex's pride commands thee,
 " To shew th' approving world thou canst resign,
 " As well as he, nor with inferior spirit,
 " A passion fatal to the public weal."

But, above all, thou must root out for ever
 From the king's breast the least remain of hope,
 And henceforth make his mention'd love dishonour.
 These things, my daughter, that must needs be done,
 Can but this way be done—by the safe refuge, 170
 The sacred shelter of a husband's arms.
 And there is one——

Sig. Good heavens! what means my lord?

Sif. One of illustrious family, high rank,
 Yet still of higher dignity and merit,
 Who can and will protect thee: one to awe
 The king himself—Nay, hear me, Sigismunda—
 The noble Osmond courts thee for his bride,
 And has my plighted word—This day—

Sig. [*Kneeling.*] My father!

180
 Let me with trembling arms embrace thy knees!
 Oh, if you ever wish to see me happy;
 If e'er in infant years I gave you joy,
 When, as I prattling twin'd around your neck,
 You snatch'd me to your bosom, kiss'd my eyes,
 And melting said you saw my mother there;
 Oh, save me from that worst severity
 Of fate! Oh, outrage not my breaking heart
 To that degree!—I cannot!—'tis impossible!—
 So soon withdraw it, give it to another— 190

" Hear me, my dearest father; hear the voice
 " Of nature and humanity, that plead
 " As well as justice for me!—Not to choose
 " Without your wise direction may be duty;
 " But still my choice is free—that is a right,
 " Which even the lowest slave can never lose.
 " And would you thus degrade me?—make me base?
 " For such it were to give my worthless person
 " Without my heart, an injury to Osmond,
 " The highest can be done"—Let me, my lord—
 Or I shall die, shall, by the sudden change,
 Be to distraction shock'd—Let me wear out
 My hapless days in solitude and silence,
 Far from the malice of a prying world;
 At least—you cannot sure refuse me this—
 Give me a little time—I will do all,
 All I can do, to please you!—" Oh, your eye
 " Sheds a kind beam"—

200

Sif. My daughter! you abuse
 The softness of my nature—

210

Sig. Here, my father,
 'Till you relent, here will I grow for ever!

Sif. Rise, Sigismunda.—Though you touch my heart,
 Nothing can shake th' inexorable dictates
 Of honour, duty, and determin'd reason.
 Then by the holy ties of filial love,
 Resolve, I charge thee, to receive Earl Osmond,
 As suits the man who is thy father's choice,
 And worthy of thy hand—I go to bring him—

Sig. Spare me, my dearest father!

220

Sif. [*Aside.*] I must rush
 From her soft grasp, or nature will betray me!
 " Oh, grant us, Heaven! that fortitude of mind,
 " Which listens to our duty, not our passions"—

Quit me, my child !

Sig. You cannot, oh, my father !

You cannot leave me thus !

Sif. Come hither, Laura,

Come to thy friend. Now shew thyself a friend.

Combat her weakness ; dissipate her tears ;

230

Cherish, and reconcile her to her duty. [*Exit Siffredi.*]

Enter LAURA.

Sig. Oh, wo on wo ! distress'd by love and duty !

Oh, every way unhappy Sigismunda !

Laura. Forgive me, madam, if I blame your grief.

How can you waste your tears on one so false ?

Unworthy of your tenderness ; to whom

Nought but contempt is due and indignation ?

Sig. You know not half the horrors of my fate !

I might perhaps have learn'd to scorn his falsehood ;

Nay, when the first sad burst of tears was past,

240

I might have rous'd my pride and scorn'd himself—

But 'tis too mush, this greatest last misfortune—

Oh, whither shall I fly ? Where hide me, Laura,

From the dire scene my father now prepares ?

Laura. What thus alarms you, madam ?

Sig. Can it be ?

Can I—ah, no!—at once give to another

My violated heart ? in one wild moment ?

He brings Earl Osmond to receive my vows,

Oh, dreadful change ! for Tancred, haughty Osmond. 250

Laura. Now, on my soul, 'tis what an outrag'd heart

Like yours should wish !—I should, by heavens, esteem it

Most exquisite revenge !

Sig. Revenge ! on whom !

On my own heart, already but too wretched !

Laura. On him ! this Tancred ! who has basely sold,

For the dull form of despicable grandeur,
His faith, his love!—At once a slave and tyrant!

Sig. Oh, rail at me, at my believing folly,
My vain ill-founded hopes, but spare him, Laura. 260

Laura. Who rais'd these hopes? who triumphs o'er that
weakness?

Pardon the word—You greatly merit him;
Better than him, with all his giddy pomp;
You rais'd him by your smiles when he was nothing.
Where is your woman's pride, that guardian spirit
Given us to dash the perfidy of man?
Ye powers! I cannot bear the thought with patience—
“ Yet recent from the most unsparing vows
“ The tongue of love e'er lavish'd; from your hopes
“ So vainly, idly, cruelly deluded;” 270

Before the public thus, before your father,
By an irrevocable solemn deed,
With such inhuman scorn, to throw you from him:
To give his faithless hand, yet warm from thine,
With complicated meanness, to Constantia.
And, to complete his crime, when thy weak limbs
Could scarce support thee, then, of thee regardless,
To lead her off.

Sig. That was indeed a sight
To poison love; to turn it into rage 280
And keen contempt.—What means this stupid weakness
That hangs upon me? Hence, unworthy tears
Disgrace my cheek no more! No more, my heart,
For one so coolly false or meanly fickle—
“ Oh, it imports not which”—dare to suggest
The least excuse!—Yes, traitor, I will wring
Thy pride, will turn thy triumph to confusion!
“ I will not pine away my days for thee,

" Sighing to brooks and groves; while, with vain pity,
 " You in a rival's arms lament my fate— 290
 " No, let me perish! ere I tamely be
 " That soft, that patient, gentle Sigismunda,
 " Who can console her with the wretched boast,
 " She was for thee unhappy!—If I am,
 " I will be nobly so!"—Sicilia's daughters
 Shall wondering see in me a great example
 Of one who punish'd an ill-judging heart,
 Who made it bow to what it most abhorr'd!
 Crush'd it to misery! for having thus
 So lightly listen'd to a worthless lover! 300

Laura. At last it mounts, the kindling pride of virtue;
 Trust me, thy marriage will embitter his—

Sig. Oh, may the furies light his nuptial torch!
 Be it accurs'd as mine! for the fair peace,
 The tender joys of hymeneal love,
 May jealousy awak'd, and fell remorse,
 Pour all their fiercest venom through his breast!—
 Where the fates lead, and blind revenge, I follow.—
 Let me not think—By injur'd love! I vow,
 Thou shalt, base prince! perfidious and inhuman! 310
 Thou shalt behold me in another's arms
 In his thou hatest! Osmond's!

Laura. " That will grind
 " His heart with secret rage:" Ay, that will sting
 His soul to madness; " set him up a terror,
 " A spectacle of wo to faithless lovers!"——
 Your cooler thought, besides, will of the change
 Approve, and think it happy. Noble Osmond
 " From the same stock with him derives his birth
 " First of Sicilian barons, prudent, brave, 320
 " Of strictest honour, and by all rever'd"——

Sig. Talk not of Osmond, but perfidious Tancred !
 Rail at him, rail ! invent new names of scorn !

Assist me, Laura ; lend my rage fresh fuel ;
 Support my staggering purpose, which already
 Begins to fail me—Ah, my vaunts how vain !
 How have I ly'd to my own heart !—Alas,
 My tears return, the mighty flood o'erwhelms me !

“ Ten thousand crowding images distract

“ My tortur'd thought—And is it come to this !

330

“ Our hopes, our vows, our oft repeated wishes,

“ Breath'd from the fervent soul, and full of heaven,

“ To make each other happy—come to this !”

Laura. If thy own peace and honour cannot keep
 Thy resolution fix'd, yet, Sigismunda,
 Oh, think, how deeply, how beyond retreat,
 Thy father is engag'd.

Sig. Ah, wretched weakness !

That thus enthrals my soul, “ that chases thence

“ Each nobler thought, the sense of every duty :”

340

And have I then no tears for thee, my father ?

Can I forget thy cares, from helpless years,

Thy tenderness for me ! “ An eye still beam'd

“ With love ; a brow that never knew a frown ;

“ Nor a harsh word thy tongue ?” Shall I for these

Repay thy stooping venerable age

With shame, disquiet, anguish, and dishonour ?

It must not be !—Thou first of angels ! come,

Sweet filial piety, and firm my breast !

Yes, let one daughter to her fate submit,

350

Be nobly wretched—but her father happy !—

Laura !—they come !—Oh, heavens, I cannot stand

The horrid trial !—Open, open earth !

And hide me from their view.

Laura. Madam.

Enter SIFFREDI and OSMOND.

Sif. My daughter,
Behold my noble friend who courts thy hand,
And whom to call my son I shall be proud ;
“ Nor shall I less be pleas’d in this alliance,
“ To see thee happy.”

360

Osm. Think not I presume
Madam, on this your father’s kind consent,
To make me blest. I love you from a heart,
That seeks your good superior to my own ;
And will by every art of tender friendship,
Consult your dearest welfare. May I hope,
Yours does not disavow your father’s choice ?

Sig. I am a daughter, sir—and have no power
O’er my own heart—I die—support me, Laura. [*Faints.*]

Sif. Help—Bear her off—She breathes—My daughter ?

Sig. Oh,

371

Forgive my weakness—soft—my Laura, lead me
To my apartment. [*Exeunt Sigis. and Laura.*]

Sif. Pardon me, my lord,
If by this sudden accident alarm’d,
I leave you for a moment.

[*Exit Siffredi.*]

Osm. Let me think——

What can this mean ?—Is it to me aversion ?
Or is it, as I fear’d, she loves another ?
Ha !—yes—perhaps the king, the young Count Tancred ;
They were bred up together—Surely that, 381
That cannot be—Has he not given his hand,
In the most solemn manner, to Constantia ?
Does not his crown depend upon the deed ?
“ No—if they lov’d, and this old statesman knew it,
“ He could not to a king prefer a subject.
“ His virtues I esteem—nay more, I trust them—

" So far as virtue goes—but could he place
 " His daughter on the throne of Sicily—
 " Oh, 'tis a glorious bribe, too much for man!" 390
 What is it then? I care not what it be,
 " My honour now, my dignity demands,
 " That my propos'd alliance, by her father,
 " And even herself accepted, be not scorn'd.
 " I love her too—I never knew till now
 " To what a pitch I love her. Oh, she shot
 " Ten thousand charms into my inmost soul!
 " She look'd so mild, so amiably gentle,
 " She bow'd her head, she glow'd with such confusion,
 " Such loveliness of modesty! She is, 400
 " In gracious mind, in manners, and in person,
 " The perfect model of all female beauty!"
 She must be mine—She is!—If yet her heart
 Consents not to my happiness, her duty,
 Join'd to my tender cares, will gain so much
 Upon her generous nature—That will follow.

*The man of sense, who acts a prudent part,
 Not flattering steals, but forms himself the heart.* [Exit.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

The Garden belonging to SIFFREDI's House. Enter SIGISMUNDA and LAURA.

Sigismunda, with a letter in her hand.

'Tis done!—I am a slave!—The fatal vow
 Has pass'd my lips!—Methought in those sad moments,
 The tombs around, the saints, the darken'd altar,
 And all the trembling shrines with horror shook.
 But here is still new matter of distress.

Oh, Tancred, cease to persecute me more !
 Oh, grudge me not some calmer state of wo ;
 Some quiet gloom to shade my hopeless days,
 Where I may never hear of love and thee ?——
 Has Laura too conspir'd against my peace ?
 Why did you take this letter ?—Bear it back—
 I will not court new pain.

10

[*Giving her the letter.*]

Laura. Madam, Rodolpho

Urg'd me so much, nay, even with tears, conjur'd me
 But this once more to serve th' unhappy king——
 For such he said he was—that though enrag'd,
 Equal with thee, at his inhuman falsehood,
 I could not to my brother's fervent prayers
 Refuse this office—Read it—His excuses
 Will only more expose his falsehood.

20

Sig. No :

It suits not Osmond's wife to read one line
 From that contagious hand—she knows too well !

Laura. He paints him out distress'd beyond expression ;
 Even on the point of madness. “ Wild as winds,
 “ And fighting seas, he raves. His passions mix,
 “ With ceaseless rage, all in each giddy moment.”
 He dies to see you, and to clear his faith.

Sig. Save me from that !—That would be worse than all !

Laura. I but report my brother's words ; who then 30
 Began to talk of some dark imposition,
 That had deceiv'd us all ; when interrupted,
 We heard your father and Earl Osmond near,
 As summon'd to Constantia's court they went.

Sig. Ha ! imposition !—Well, if I am doom'd
 To be, o'er all my sex, the wretch of love,
 In vain I would resist—Give me the letter—
 To know the worst is some relief—Alas,

It was not thus, with such dire palpitations,
That, Tancred, once I us'd to read thy letters. 40

[*Attempting to read the letter, but gives it to Laura.*]

Ah, fond remembrance blinds me!—Read it, Laura.

Laura. [*Reads.*] ‘Deliver me, Sigismunda, from that most exquisite misery which a faithful heart can suffer—To be thought base by her, from whose esteem even virtue borrows new charms. When I submitted to my cruel situation, it was not falsehood you beheld, but an excess of love. Rather than endanger that, I for a while gave up my honour. Every moment till I see you stabs me with severer pangs than real guilt itself can feel. Let me then conjure you to meet me in the garden, towards the close of the day, when I will explain this mystery. We have been most inhumanly abused; and that by the means of the very paper which I gave you, from the warmest sincerity of love, to assure to you the heart and hand of

TANCRED.’

Sig. There, Laura, there, the dreadful secret sprung!
That paper, ah, that paper! it suggests
A thousand horrid thoughts—I to my father
Gave it! and he perhaps—I dare not cast
A look that way—If yet indeed you love me, 60
Oh, blast me not, kind Tancred, with the truth!
Oh, pitying keep me ignorant for ever.
What strange peculiar misery is mine?
Reduc'd to wish the man I love were false!
“Why was I hurry'd to a step so rash?
“Repairless wo!—I might have waited, sure,
“A few short hours—No duty that forbade—
“I ow'd thy love that justice; till this day
“Thy love an image of all perfect goodness!
“A beam from heaven that glow'd with every virtue! 70

“ And have I thrown this prize of life away ?

“ The piteous wreck of one distracted moment ?

“ Ah, the cold prudence of remorseless age !

“ Ah, parents, traitors to your children’s bliss !

“ Ah, curs’d, ah, blind revenge !—On every hand

“ I was betray’d—You, Laura, too, betray’d me !

“ *Laura.* Who, who but he, whate’er he writes, betray’d
you ?

“ Or false or pusillanimous. For once,

“ I will with you suppose, that his agreement

“ To the king’s will was forg’d—Though forg’d by whom ?

“ Your father scorns the crime—Yet what avails it ? 81

“ This, if it clears his truth, condemns his spirit.

“ A youthful king, by love and honour fir’d,

“ Patient to sit on his insulted throne,

“ And let an outrage, of so high a nature,

“ Unpunish’d pass, uncheck’d, uncontradicted—

“ Oh, ’tis a meanness equal even to falsehood.

“ *Sig.* Laura, no more—We have already judg’d

“ Too largely without knowledge. Oft, what seems

“ A trifle, a mere nothing, by itself, 90

“ In some nice situation turns the scale

“ Of fate, and rules the most important actions.

“ Yes, I begin to feel a sad presage !

“ I am undone, from that eternal source

“ Of human woes—the judgment of the passions.

“ But what have I to do with these excuses ?

“ Oh, cease, my treacherous heart, to give them room !

“ It suits not thee to plead a lover’s cause :

“ Even to lament my fate is now dishonour.

“ Nought now remains, but with relentless purpose, 100

“ To shun all interviews, all clearing up

“ Of this dark scene ; to wrap myself in gloom,

“ In solitude and shades ; there to devour
 “ The silent sorrows ever swelling here ;
 “ And since I must be wretched—for I must—
 “ To claim the mighty misery myself,
 “ Engross it all, and spare a hapless father.
 “ Hence, let me fly !—The hour approaches——”

Laura. Madam,

Behold he comes—the king—

110

Sig. Heavens ! how escape ?

No—I will stay—This one last meeting—Leave me.

[*Exit Laura.*

Enter TANCRED.

Tan. And are these long, long hours of torture past ?
 My life ! my Sigismunda ! [*Throwing himself at her feet.*

Sig. Rise, my lord.

To see my sovereign thus no more becomes me.

Tan. Oh, let me kiss the ground on which you tread !

Let me exhale my soul in softest transport !

Since I again behold my Sigismunda !

[*Rising.*

Unkind ! how couldst thou ever deem me false ?

120

How thus dishonour love ?—“ Oh, I could much

“ Embitter my complaint !—how low were then

“ Thy thoughts of me ? How didst thou then affront

“ The human heart itself ?” After the vows,

The fervent truth, the tender protestations,

Which mine has often pour’d, to let thy breast,

Whate’er th’ appearance was, admit suspicion ?

Sig. How ! when I heard myself your full consent

To the late king’s so just and prudent will ?

Heard it before you read, in solemn senate ?

130

When I beheld you give your royal hand,

To her, whose birth and dignity of right

Demands that high alliance ? Yes, my lord,

You have done well. The man whom heaven appoints
To govern others, should himself first learn
To bend his passions to the sway of reason.
In all, you have done well; but when you bid
My humbled hopes look up to you again,
And sooth'd with wanton cruelty my weakness—
That too was well—My vanity deserv'd

140

The sharp rebuke, “ whose fond extravagance
“ Could ever dream to balance your repose,
“ Your glory, and the welfare of a people.”

Tan. Chide on, chide on. Thy soft reproaches now,
Instead of wounding, only sooth my fondness.
No, no, thou charming consort of my soul !
I never lov'd thee with such faithful ardour,
As in that cruel miserable moment
You thought me false ; “ when even my honour stoop'd
“ To wear for thee a baffled face of baseness.”

150

It was thy barbarous father, Sigismunda,
Who caught me in the toil. He turn'd that paper,
Meant for th' assuring bond of nuptial love,
To ruin it for ever ; he, he wrote
That forg'd consent, you heard, beneath my name,
“ Nay, dar'd before my outrag'd throne to read it !”
Had he not been thy father——Ha ! my love !
You tremble, you grow pale !

Sig. Oh, leave me, Tancred !

Tan. No !—Leave thee !—Never ! never till you set 160
My heart at peace, till these dear lips again
Pronounce thee mine !—Without thee, I renounce
Myself, my friends, the world—Here on this hand—

Sig. My lord, forget that hand, which never now
Can be to thine united——

Tan. Sigismunda !

What dost thou mean?—Thy words, thy look, thy manner,
Seem to conceal some horrid secret—Heavens!—
No—that was wild—Distraction fires the thought!—

Sig. Inquire no more—I never can be thine. 170

Tan. What, who shall interpose? Who dares attempt
To brave the fury of an injur'd king,
Who, ere he sees thee ravish'd from his hopes,
Will wrap all blazing Sicily in flames?—

Sig. In vain your power, my lord—'Tis fatal error,
Join'd to my father's unrelenting will,
Has plac'd an everlasting bar betwixt us—
I am—Earl Osmond's—wife.

Tan. Earl Osmond's wife!—

[After a long pause, during which they look at one another
with the highest agitation, and most tender distress.

Heavens! did I hear thee right? What! marry'd? marry'd?
Lost to thy faithful Tancred? lost for ever! 181

Couldst thou then doom me to such matchless wo,
Without so much as hearing me?—Distraction!—

Alas! what hast thou done? Ah, Sigismunda!

Thy rash credulity has done a deed,
Which, of two happiest lovers that e'er felt
The blissful power, has made two finish'd wretches!
But—madness!—Sure, thou know'st it cannot be!
This hand is mine! a thousand thousand vows—

Enter OSMOND.

Osm. [Snatching her hand from the king.] Madam, this hand,
by the most solemn rites, 191

A little hour ago, was given to me,
And did not sovereign honour now command me,
Never but with my life to quit my claim,
I would renounce it—thus!

Tan. Ha, who art thou ?

Presumptuous man !

Sig. [*Aside.*] Where is my father ? Heavens ! [*Goes out.*]

Osm. One thou shouldst better know—Yes, view me, one
Who can and will maintain his rights and honour,
Against a faithless prince, an upstart king, 200
Whose first base deed is what a harden'd tyrant
Would blush to act.

Tan. Insolent Osmond ! know,
This upstart king will hurl confusion on thee,
And all who shall invade his sacred rights,
Prior to thine—thine, founded on compulsion,
On infamous deceit, “ while his proceed
“ From mutual love, and free long-plighted faith.
“ She is, and shall be mine !”—I will annul
By the high power with which the law invests me, 210
Those guilty forms in which you have entrapp'd,
“ Basely entrapp'd, to thy detested nuptials,”
My queen betroth'd, who has my heart, my hand,
And shall partake my throne—If, haughty lord,
If this thou didst not know, then know it now ;
And know, besides, as I have told thee this,
Shouldst thou but think to urge thy treason further—
“ Than treason more ! treason against my love !”—
Thy life shall answer for it.

Osm. Ha ! my life !——

It moves my scorn to hear thy empty threats.
When was it that a Norman baron's life
Became so vile, as on the frown of kings
To hang ?—Of that, my lord, the law must judge :
Or, if the law be weak, my guardian sword——

Tan. Dare not to touch it, traitor, lest my rage
Break loose, and do a deed that misbecomes me.

Enter SIFFREDI.

Sif. My gracious lord, what is it I behold !
 My sovereign in contention with his subjects ?
 Surely this house deserves from royal Tancred 230
 A little more regard, than to be made
 A scene of trouble, and unseemly jars.
 " It grieves my soul, it baffles every hope,
 " It makes me sick of life, to see thy glory
 " Thus blasted in the bud."—Heavens ! can your highness
 From your exalted character descend,
 " The dignity of virtue; and, instead
 " Of being the protector of our rights,
 " The holy guardian of domestic bliss,"
 Unkindly thus disturb the sweet repose, 240
 The secret peace of families, for which
 Alone the free-born race of man to laws
 And government submitted ?

Tan. My lord Siffredi,
 Spare thy rebuke. The duties of my station
 Are not to me unknown. But thou, old man,
 Dost thou not blush to talk of rights invaded ;
 And of our best our dearest bliss disturb'd ?
 Thou, who with more than barbarous perfidy
 Hast trampled all allegiance, justice, truth, 250
 Humanity itself, beneath thy feet ?
 Thou know'st thou hast—I could, to thy confusion,
 Return thy hard reproaches ; but I spare thee
 Before this lord, for whose ill-sorted friendship
 Thou hast most basely sacrific'd thy daughter.
 Farewell, my lord.—For thee, lord constable,
 Who dost presume to lift thy surly eye
 To my soft love, my gentle Sigismunda,

I once again command thee on thy life——

Yes—chew thy rage—but mark me—on thy life, 260

No further urge thy arrogant pretensions ! [Exit Tan.

Osm. Ha ! Arrogant pretensions ! Heaven and earth !

What ! arrogant pretensions to my wife ?

My wedded wife ! Where are we ? in a land

Of civil rule, of liberty and laws ?——

Not, on my life, pursue them ?—Giddy prince !

My life disdains thy nod. It is the gift

Of parent Heaven, who gave me too an arm,

A spirit to defend it against tyrants.

“ The Norman race, the sons of mighty Rollo, 270

“ Who rushing in a tempest from the north,

“ Great nurse of generous freemen, bravely won

“ With their own swords their seats, and still possess them

“ By the same noble tenure, are not us’d

“ To hear such language——If I now desist,

“ Then brand me for a coward ! deem me villain !

“ A traitor to the public ! By this conduct

“ Deceiv’d, betray’d, insulted, tyranniz’d.”

Mine is a common cause. My arm shall guard,

Mix’d with my own, the rights of each Sicilian, 280

“ Of social life, and of mankind in general.”

Ere to thy tyrant rage they fall a prey,

I shall find means to shake thy tottering throne,

“ Which this illegal, this perfidious usage

“ Forfeits at once,” and crush thee in the ruins !——

Constantia is my queen !

Sif. Lord constable,

Let us be stedfast in the right ; but let us

Act with cool prudence, and with manly temper,

As well as manly firmness. “ True, I own,

“ Th’ indignities you suffer are so high, 290

" As might even justify what now you threaten.
 " But if, my lord, we can prevent the woes,
 " The cruel horrors of intestine war,
 " Yet hold untouch'd our liberties and laws :
 " Oh, let us, rais'd above the turbid sphere
 " Of little selfish passions, nobly do it !
 " Nor to our hot, intemperate pride, pour out
 " A dire libation of Sicilian blood.
 " 'Tis godlike magnanimity to keep, 300
 " When most provok'd, our reason calm and clear,
 " And execute her will from a strong sense
 " Of what is right, without the vulgar aid
 " Of heat and passion, which, though honest, bears us
 " Often too far." Remember that my house
 Protects my daughter still ; and ere I saw her
 Thus ravish'd from us by the arm of power,
 This hand should act the Roman father's part.
 Fear not ; be temperate ; all will yet be well.
 I know the king. " At first his passions burst 310
 " Quick as the lightning's flash ; but in his breast
 " Honour and justice dwell"—Trust me, to reason
 He will return.

Osm. He will !—By heavens, he shall !—
 You know the king—I wish, my lord Siffredi,
 That you had deign'd to tell me all you knew—
 And would you have me wait with duteous patience,
 Till he return to reason ? Ye just powers !
 When he has planted on our necks his foot,
 And trod us into slaves ; when his vain pride, 320
 Is cloy'd with our submission ; " if, at last,
 " He finds his arm too weak to shake the frame
 " Of wide-establish'd order out of joint,
 " And overturn all justice ; then, perchance,
 " He, in a fit of sickly kind repentance,

“ May make a merit to return to reason.”
 No, no, my lord ! there is a nobler way,
 To teach the blind oppressive fury reason :
 Oft has the lustre of avenging steel
 Unseal'd her stupid eyes—The sword is reason !

330

Enter RODOLPHO with Guards.

Rod. My lord high constable of Sicily,
 In the king's name, and by his special order,
 I here arrest you prisoner of state.

Osm. What king ? I know no king of Sicily,
 Unless he be the husband of Constantia.

Rod. Then know him now—behold his royal orders
 To bear you to the castle of Palermo.

Sif. Let the big torrent foam its madness off.
 Submit, my lord—No castle long can hold
 Our wrongs—This, more than friendship or alliance, 340
 Confirms me thine ; this binds me to thy fortunes,
 By the strong tie of common injury,
 Which nothing can dissolve—I grieve, Rodolpho,
 To see the reign in such unhappy sort
 Begin.

Osm. The reign ! the usurpation call it !
 This meteor king may blaze a while, but soon
 Must spend his idle terrors—Sir, lead on—
 Farewell, my lord—more than my life and fortune,
 Remember well, is in your hands—my honour ! 350

Sif. Our honour is the same. My son, farewell—
 We shall not long be parted. On these eyes
 Sleep shall not shed his balm, till I behold thee
 Restor'd to freedom, or partake thy bonds.

*Even noble courage is not void of blame,
 Till nobler patience sanctifies its flame.*

ACT V. SCENE I.

A Chamber.

Siffredi alone.

THE prospect lowers around. I found the king,
Though calm'd a little, with subsiding tempest,
As suits his generous nature, yet in love
Abated nought, most ardent in his purpose ;
Inexorably fix'd, whate'er the risk,
To claim my daughter, and dissolve this marriage—
I have embark'd upon a perilous sea,
A mighty treasure. “ Here the rapid youth,
“ Th’ impetuous passions of a lover-king,
“ Check my bold purpose; and there, the jealous pride, 10
“ Th’ impatient honour of a haughty lord,
“ Of the first rank, in interest and dependance
“ Near equal to the king, forbid retreat.
“ My honour too, the same unchang'd conviction,
“ That these my measures were, and still remain,
“ Of absolute necessity to save
“ The land from civil fury, urge me on.
“ But how proceed ?—I only faster rush
“ Upon the desperate evils I would shun.
“ Whate'er the motive be, deceit, I fear, 20
“ And harsh unnatural force, are not the means
“ Of public welfare, or of private bliss”——
Bear witness, Heaven ! thou mind-inspecting eye !
My breast is pure. I have preferr'd my duty,
The good and safety of my fellow-subjects,
To all those views that fire the selfish race
Of mortal men, and mix them in eternal broils.

Enter an Officer belonging to SIFFREDI.

Off. My lord, a man of noble port, his face
Wrapt in disguise, is earnest for admission.

Sif. Go, bid him enter——

[Officer goes out.

Ha! wrapp'd in disguise!

31

And at this late unseasonable hour!

“ When o’er the world tremendous midnight reigns,

“ By the dire gloom of raging tempest doubled——”

Who can it be?

Enter OSMOND discovering himself.

Sif. “ What! ha!” Earl Osmond, you?—Welcome, once
more,

To this glad roof!——But why in this disguise?

Would I could hope the king exceeds his promise!

I have his faith, soon as to-morrow’s sun

Shall gild Sicilia’s cliffs, you shall be free.——

40

Has some good angel turn’d his heart to justice?

Osm. It is not by the favour of Count Tancred

That I am here. As much I scorn his favour,

As I defy his tyranny and threats——

Our friend Gottredo, who commands the castle,

On my parole, ere drawn to render back

My person, has permitted me this freedom.

Know then the faithless outrage of to-day,

By him committed whom you call the king,

Has rous’d Constantia’s court. Our friends, the friends 50

Of virtue, justice, and of public faith,

Ripe for revolt, are in high ferment all.

“ This, this, they say, exceeds whate’er deform’d

“ The miserable days we saw beneath

“ William the Bad. This saps the solid base,

“ At once, of government and private life :
“ This shameless imposition on the faith,
“ The majesty of senates, this lewd insult,
“ This violation of the rights of men,
“ Added to these, his ignominious treatment 60
“ Of her, th’ illustrious offspring of our kings,
“ Sicilia’s hope, and now our royal mistress.
“ You know, my lord, how grossly these infringe
“ The late king’s will, which orders, if count Tancred
“ Make not Constantia partner of his throne,
“ That he be quite excluded the succession,
“ And she to Henry given, king of the Romans,
“ The potent emperor Barbarossa’s son,
“ Who seeks with earnest instance her alliance.”

I thence of you, as guardian of the laws, 70
As guardian of this will, to you intrusted,
Desire, nay more, demand your instant aid,
To see it put in vigorous execution.

Sif. You cannot doubt, my lord, of my concurrence.
Who, more than I, have labour’d this great point ?
’Tis my own plan ; and if I drop it now,
I should be justly branded with the shame
Of rash advice, or despicable weakness.

But let us not precipitate the matter.
Constantia’s friends are numerous and strong ; 80
Yet Tancred’s, trust me, are of equal force :
E’er since the secret of his birth was known,
The people all are in a tumult hurl’d,
Of boundless joy, “ to hear there lives a prince
“ Of mighty Guiscard’s line. Numbers, besides,
“ Of powerful barons, who at heart had pin’d,
“ To see the reign of their renown’d forefathers,
“ Won by immortal deeds of matchless valour,

" Pass from the gallant Normans to the Suevi,
 " Will with a kind of rage espouse his cause—
 " 'Tis so, my lord—be not by passion blinded—
 " 'Tis surely so"—Oh, if our prating virtue
 Dwells not in words alone—Oh, let us join,
 My generous Osmond, to avert these woes,
 And yet sustain our tottering Norman kingdom!

90

Osm. But how, Siffredi, how?—If by soft means
 We can maintain our rights, and save our country,
 May his unnatural blood first stain the sword,
 Who with unpitying fury first shall draw it!

Sif. I have a thought—The glorious work be thine. 100

" But it requires an awful flight of virtue,
 " Above the passions of the vulgar breast,
 " And thence from thee I hope it, noble Osmond"—
 Suppose my daughter, to her God devoted,
 Were plac'd within some convent's sacred verge,
 Beneath the dread protection of the altar—

Osm. Ere then, by heavens! I would " devoutly shave
 " My holy scalp," turn whining monk myself,
 And pray incessant for the tyrant's safety.—
 What! How! because an insolent invader,
 A sacrilegious tyrant, " in contempt
 " Of all those noblest rights, which to maintain
 " Is man's peculiar pride," demands my wife;
 " That I shall thus betray the common cause
 " Of human kind."

110

*What! shall I tamely yield her up,
 Even in the manner you propose?—Oh, then
 I were supremely vile! degraded! sham'd!
 The scorn of manhood! and abhorr'd of honour!*

Sif. There is, my lord, an honour, the calm child
 Of reason, of humanity, and mercy,

120

Superior far to this punctilious demon,
That singly minds itself, and oft embroils
With proud barbarian niceties the world.

Osm. My lord, my lord, I cannot brook your prudence ;
It holds a pulse unequal to my blood——
Unblemish'd honour is the flower of virtue !
The vivifying soul ! and he who slights it,
Will leave the other dull and lifeless dross.

Sif. No more——You are too warm. 130

Osm. You are too cool,

Sif. Too cool, my lord ? I were indeed too cool,
Not to resent this language, and to tell thee——
I wish Earl Osmond were as cool as I
To his own selfish bliss——ay, and as warm
To that of others——But of this no more——
My daughter is thy wife——I gave her to thee,
And will, against all force, maintain her thine.
But think not I will catch thy headlong passions,
Whirl'd in a blaze of madness o'er the land ; 140
Or, till the last extremity compel me,
Risk the dire means of war——The king, to-morrow,
Will set you free ; and, if by gentle means
He does not yield my daughter to your arms,
And wed Constantia, as the will requires,
Why then expect me on the side of justice——
Let that suffice.

Osm. It does——Forgive my heat.
My rankled mind, by injuries inflam'd,
May be too prompt to take, and give offence. 150

Sif. 'Tis past——Your wrongs, I own, may well transport
The wisest mind——But henceforth, noble Osmond,
Do me more justice, honour more my truth,
Nor mark me with an eye of squint suspicion——

“ These jars apart—You may repose your soul
 “ On my firm faith, and unremitting friendship.
 “ Of that I sure have given exalted proof,
 “ And the next sun we see shall prove it further.”
 Return, my son, and from your friend Goffredo
 Release your word. There try, by soft repose,
 To calm your breast.

160

Osm. Bid the vext ocean sleep,
 Swept by the pinions of the raging north—
 But your frail age, by care and toil exhausted,
 Demands the balm of all-repairing rest.

Sif. Soon as to-morrow's dawn shall streak the skies,
 I, with my friends in solemn state assembled,
 Will to the palace, and demand your freedom,
 Then by calm reason, or by higher means,
 The king shall quit his claim, and in the face
 Of Sicily, my daughter shall be yours.
 Farewell.

170

Osm. My lord, good-night.

[*Exit Siffredi.*]

[*After a long pause.*] I like him not—
 Yes—I have mighty matter of suspicion.
 “ 'Tis plain. I see it lurking in his breast,
 “ He has a foolish fondness for this king”—
 My honour is not safe, while here my wife
 Remains—Who knows but he this very night
 May bear her to some convent, as he mention'd—
 The king too—though I smother'd up my rage,
 I mark'd it well—will set me free to-morrow.
 Why not to-night? He has some dark design—
 By heavens, he has!—I am abus'd most grossly;
 Made the vile tool of this old statesman's schemes;
 “ Marry'd to one—ay, and he knew it—one
 “ Who loves young Tancred! Hence her swooning, tears,

180

“ And all her soft distress, when she disgrac’d me,
“ By basely giving her perfidious hand
“ Without her heart—Hell and perdition! this, 190
“ This is the perfidy!—This is the fell,
“ The keen, envenom’d, exquisite disgrace,
“ Which, to a man of honour, even exceeds
“ The falsehood of the person—But I now
“ Will rouse me from the poor tame lethargy,
“ By my believing fondness cast upon me.”
I will not wait his crawling timid motions,
“ Perhaps to blind me meant, which he to-morrow
“ Has promis’d to pursue. No! ere his eyes
“ Shall open on to-morrow’s orient beam,” 200
I will convince him that Earl Osmond never
Was form’d to be his dupe—“ I know full well
“ Th’ important weight and danger of the deed :
“ But to a man, whom greater dangers press,
“ Driven to the brink of infamy and horror,
“ Rashness itself, and utter desperation,
“ Are the best prudence.”—I will bear her off
This night, and lodge her in a place of safety :
I have a trusty band that waits not far.
Hence! let me lose no time—One rapid moment 210
Should ardent form, at once, and execute
A bold design—’Tis fix’d—“ ’Tis done!—yes, then,
“ When I have seiz’d the prize of love and honour,
“ And with a friend secur’d her; to the castle
“ I will repair, and claim Goffredo’s promise
“ To rise with all his garrison—My friends
“ With brave impatience wait.” The mine is laid,
And only wants my kindling touch to spring. [Exit.

SCENE II.

SIGISMUNDA's Apartment. Enter SIGISMUNDA and LAURA.

[Thunder.

Laura. Heavens! 'tis a fearful night!

Sig. Ah! the black rage

220

Of midnight tempest, or th' assuring smiles

Of radiant morn, are equal all to me.

Nought now has charms or terrors to my breast,

The seat of stupid wo!—Leave me, my Laura.

Kind rest, perhaps, may hush my woes a little.

Oh, for that quiet sleep that knows no morning!

Laura. Madam, indeed I know not how to go.

Indulge my fondness—Let me watch a while

By your sad bed, 'till these dread hours shall pass.

Sig. Alas! what is the toil of elements,

[Thunder.

This idle perturbation of the sky,

231

To what I feel within?—Oh, that the fires

Of pitying heaven would point their fury here!

Good-night, my dearest Laura.

Laura. Oh, I know not

What this oppression means—But 'tis with pain,

With tears, I can persuade myself to leave you—

Well, then—good-night, my dearest Sigismunda.

[Exit.

Sig. And am I then alone?—The most undone,

Most wretched being now beneath the cope

240

Of this affrighting gloom that wraps the world—

I said I did not fear—Ah, me! I feel

A shivering horror run through all my powers!

Oh, I am nought but tumult, fears, and weakness!

And yet how idle fear when hope is gone.

Gone, gone for ever!—Oh, thou gentle scene

[Looking towards her bed.

Of sweet repose, where, by th' oblivious draught
Of each sad toilsome day, to peace restor'd,
Unhappy mortals lose their woes awhile,
Thou hast no peace for me!—What shall I do? 250
How pass this dreadful night, so big with terror?—
Here with the midnight shades, here will I sit,

[*Sitting down.*

A prey to dire despair, and ceaseless weep
The hours away—Bless me—I heard a noise—
[*Starting up.*

No—I mistook—nothing but silence reigns
And awful midnight round—Again!— Oh, heavens!
My lord the king!

Enter TANCRED.

Tan. Be not alarm'd, my love!

Sig. My royal lord, why at this midnight hour,
How came you hither? 260

Tan. By that secret way
My love contriv'd, when we, in happier days,
Us'd to devote these hours, so much in vain,
To vows of love, and everlasting friendship.

Sig. Why will you thus persist to add new stings
To her distress, who never can be thine?
Oh, fly me! fly! You know—

Tan. I know too much.
Oh, how I could reproach thee, Sigismunda!
Pour out my injur'd soul in just complaints! 270
But now the time permits not, these swift moments—
I told thee how thy father's artifice
Forc'd me to seem perfidious in thy eyes.

“ Ah, fatal blindness! not to have observ'd
“ The mingled pangs of rage and love that shook me:

“ When by my cruel public situation
“ Compell’d, I only feign’d consent, to gain
“ A little time, and more secure thee mine.”
E’er since—a dreadful interval of care!
My thoughts have been employ’d, not without hope, 280
How to defeat Siffredi’s barbarous purpose.
But thy credulity has ruin’d all,
Thy rash, thy wild—I know not what to name it—
Oh, it has prov’d the giddy hopes of man
To be delusion all, and sick’ning folly!

Sig. Ah, generous Tancred! ah, thy truth destroys me!
Yes, yes, ’tis I, ’tis I alone am false!
My hasty rage, join’d to my tame submission,
More than the most exalted filial duty
Could e’er demand, has dash’d our cup of fate 290
With bitterness unequall’d—But, alas!
What are thy woes to mine?—to mine! just Heaven!
Now is thy turn of vengeance—hate, renounce me!
Oh, leave me to the fate I well deserve,
To sink in hopeless misery!—at least,
Try to forget the worthless Sigismunda!

Tan. Forget thee! No! Thou art my soul itself!
I have no thought, no hope, no wish but thee!
“ Even this repented injury, the fears,
“ That rouse me all to madness, at the thought 300
“ Of losing thee, the whole collected pains
“ Of my full heart, serve but to make thee dearer.”
Ah, how, forget thee!—Much must be forgot,
Ere Tancred can forget his Sigismunda!

Sig. But you, my lord, must make that great effort.

Tan. Can Sigismunda make it?

Sig. Ah, I know not
With what success—But all that feeble woman

And love-entangled reason can perform,
I, to the utmost, will exert to do it.

310

“*Tan.* Fear not—’Tis done!—If thou canst form the
thought,

“ Success is sure—I am forgot already.

“*Sig.* Ah, Tancred!—But, my lord, respect me more.

“ Think who I am—What can you now propose?

“*Tan.* To claim the plighted vows which Heaven has
heard,

“ To vindicate the rights of holy love

“ By faith and honour bound, to which compar’d

“ These empty forms, which have ensnar’d thy hand,

“ Are impious guile, abuse, and profanation——

“ Nay, as a king, whose high prerogative

320

“ By this unlicens’d marriage is affronted,

“ To bid the laws themselves pronounce it void.

“*Sig.* Honour, my lord, is much too proud to catch

“ At every slender twig of nice distinctions.

“ These for th’ unfeeling vulgar may do well:

“ But those whose souls are by the nicer rule

“ Of virtuous delicacy nobly sway’d,

“ Stand at another bar than that of laws.

“ Then cease to urge me—Since I am not born

“ To that exalted fate to be your queen——

330

“ Or, yet a dearer name——to be your wife!

“ I am the wife of an illustrious lord

“ Of your own princely blood; and what I am,

“ I will with proper dignity remain.

“ Retire, my royal lord.—There is no means

“ To cure the wounds this fatal day has given.

“ We meet no more!”

Tan. Oh, barbarous Sigismunda!

And canst thou talk thus steadily; thus treat me

With such un pitying, unrelenting rigour?
 Poor is the love, that rather than give up
 A little pride, a little formal pride,
 The breath of vanity, can bear to see
 The man, whose heart was once so dear to thine,
 By many a tender vow so mix'd together,
 A prey to anguish, fury, and distraction!
 Thou canst not surely make me such a wretch,
 Thou canst not, Sigismunda!—Yet relent,
 Oh, save us yet!—Rodolpho, with my guards,
 Waits in the garden—Let us seize the moments
 We ne'er may have again—With more than power
 I will assert thee mine, with fairest honour.
 The world shall even approve; each honest bosom
 Swell'd with a kindred joy to see us happy.

340

350

Sig. The world approve! what is the world to me?
 The conscious mind is its own awful world.—

*And mine is fix'd—Distress me then no more;
 Not all the heart can plead, (and it, alas,
 Pleads but too much)*

“ And yet, perhaps, if thou wert not a king,
 “ I know not, Tancred, what I might have done.
 “ Then, then, my conduct, sanctify'd by love,
 “ Could not be deem'd, by the severest judge,
 “ The mean effect of interest or ambition.
 “ But now not all my partial heart can plead,”
 Shall ever shake th' unalterable dictates
 That tyrannize my breast.

360

Tan. 'Tis well—No more—

I yield me to my fate—Yes, yes, inhuman!
 Since thy barbarian heart is steel'd by pride,
 Shut up to love and pity, here behold me
 Cast on the ground, a vile and abject wretch!

370

Lost to all cares, all dignities, all duties !
Here will I grow, breathe out my faithful soul,
Here at thy feet—Death, death alone shall part us !

Sig. Have you then vow'd to drive me to perdition !

What can I more ?—Yes, Tancred ! once again

I will forget the dignity my station

Commands me to sustain—for the last time

Will tell thee, that, I fear no ties, no duty,

380

Can ever root thee from my hapless bosom.

Oh, leave me ! fly me ! were it but in pity !—

To see what once we tenderly have lov'd,

Cut off from every hope—cut off for ever !

Is pain thy generosity should spare me.

Then rise, my lord ; and if you truly love me,

If you respect my honour, nay, my peace,

Retire ! for though th' emotions of my heart

Can ne'er alarm my virtue ; yet, alas !

They tear it so, they pierce it with such anguish—

390

Oh, 'tis too much !—I cannot bear the conflict !

Enter OSMOND.

Osm. Turn, tyrant, turn ! and answer to my honour,
For this thy base insufferable outrage !

Tan. Insolent traitor ! think not to escape

Thyself my vengeance ! *[They fight, Osmond falls.]*

Sig. Help, here ! Help !—Oh, heavens !

[Throwing herself down by him.]

Alas, my lord, what meant your headlong rage ?

That faith, which I this day upon the altar,

To you devoted, is unblemish'd, pure

As vestal truth ; was resolutely yours,

400

Beyond the power of aught on earth to shake it.

Osm. Perfidious woman ! die !—*[Shortening his sword, he plunges it into her breast.]* and to the grave

Attend a husband, yet but half aveng'd !

Tan. Oh, horror ! horror ! execrable villain !

Osm. And, tyrant ! thou !—thou shalt not o'er my tomb

Exult—'Tis well—'Tis great !—I die content !— [Dies.]

Enter RODOLPHO and LAURA.

Tan. [*Throwing himself down by Sigismunda.*] Quick ! here !
bring aid !—"All in Palermo bring,
"Whose skill can save her !"—Ah, that gentle bosom
Pours fast the streams of life.

Sig. All aid is vain, 410
I feel the powerful hand of death upon me—
But, oh ! it sheds a sweetness through my fate,
That I am thine again ; and without blame
May in my Tancred's arms resign my soul !

Tan. Oh, death is in that voice ! so gently mild,
So sadly sweet, as mixes even with mine
The tears of hovering angels!—Mine again !—
And is it thus the cruel fates have join'd us ?
Are these the horrid nuptials they prepare
For love like ours ?—"Is virtue thus rewarded ? 420
"Let not my impious rage accuse just Heaven !
"Thou, Tancred, thou, hast murder'd Sigismunda !
"That furious man was but the tool of fate,
"I, I the cause !—But I will do thee justice
"On this deaf heart ! that to thy tender wisdom
"Refus'd an ear"—Yes, death shall soon unite us.

Sig. Live, live, my Tancred !—Let my death suffice
To expiate all that may have been amiss.
May it appease the fates, avert their fury
From thy propitious reign ! "Meantime, of me 430
"And of thy glory mindful, live, I charge thee,
"To guard our friends, and make thy people happy—"

Enter SIFFREDI fixed in astonishment and grief.

My father!—Oh, how shall I lift my eyes
To thee, my sinking father!

Sif. Awful Heaven!

I am chastis'd—My dearest child!—

Sig. Where am I?

A fearful darkness closes all around—

My friends! We needs must part—I must obey
Th' impetuous call—Farewell, my Laura! “cherish

440

“ My poor afflicted father's age—Rodolpho,

“ Now is the time to watch th' unhappy king,

“ With all the care and tenderness of friendship.”—

Oh, my dear father, bow'd beneath the weight

Of age and grief—the victim even of virtue,

Receive my last adieu!—Where art thou, Tancred?

Give me thy hand—But, ah, it cannot save me

From the dire king of terrors, whose cold power

Creeps o'er my heart—Oh!

Tan. How these pangs distract me!

450

Oh, lift thy gracious eyes!—Thou leav'st me then!

Thou leav'st me, Sigismunda!

Sig. “ Yet a moment—

“ I had, my Tancred, something more to say—

“ Yes—but thy love and tenderness for me,

“ Sure makes it needless—Harbour no resentment

“ Against my father; venerate his zeal,

“ That acted from a principle of goodness,

“ From faithful love to thee—Live, and maintain

“ My innocence embalm'd, with holiest care

460

“ Preserve my spotless memory!” Oh,—I die—

Eternal Mercy take my trembling soul!

Oh, 'tis the only sting of death to part

From those we love—from thee—farewell, my Tancred! [*Dies*]

Tan. Thus then !

[*Flying to his sword, is held by Rodolpho.*]

Rod. Hold, hold, my lord !—Have you forgot
Your Sigismunda's last request already ?

Tan. Off ! set me free ! Think not to bind me down,
With barbarous friendship, to the rack of life !
What hand can shut the thousand thousand gates 470
Which death still opens to the woes of mortals ?—
“ I shall find means—No power in earth or heaven
“ Can force me to endure the hateful light,
“ Thus robb'd of all that lent it joy and sweetness !”
Off, traitors, off ! or my distracted soul
Will burst indignant from this jail of nature,
To where she beckons yonder—No, mild seraph,
Point not to life—I cannot linger here,
Cut off from thee, the miserable pity,
The scorn of human kind !—A trampled king ! 480
“ Who let his mean poor-hearted love, one moment,
“ To coward prudence stoop ! who made it not
“ The first undoubting action of his reign,
“ To snatch thee to his throne, and there to shield thee,
“ Thy helpless bosom, from a ruffian's fury !”—
Oh, shame ! Oh, agony ! Oh, the fell stings
Of late, of vain repentance !—Ha, my brain
Is all on fire ! a wild abyss of thought !
Th' infernal world discloses ! See ! behold him !
Lo ! with fierce smiles he shakes the bloody steel, 490
And mocks my feeble tears.—Hence, quickly, hence !
Spurn his vile carcase ! give it to the dogs !
Expose it to the winds and screaming ravens !
“ Or hurl it down that fiery steep to hell,
“ There with his soul to toss in flames for ever.”
Ah, impotence of rage !

Rod. *Preserve him, Heaven !*

Tan. What am I? Where?
 Sad, silent, all?—The forms of dumb despair,
 Around some mournful tomb.—What do I see? 500
 This soft abode of innocence and love
 Turn'd to the house of death! a place of horror!—
 Ah, that poor corse! pale, pale! deform'd with murder!
 Is that my Sigismunda? [Throws himself down by her.

Sif. [After a pathetic pause, looking on the scene before him.
 Have I liv'd

To these enfeebled years, by Heaven reserv'd
 To be a dreadful monument of justice?—
 Rodolpho, raise the king, and bear him hence
 From this distracting scene of blood and death.

“ Alas, I dare not give him my assistance; 510

“ My care would only more inflame his rage,

“ Behold the fatal work of my dark hand,

“ That by rude force the passions would command,

“ That ruthless thought to root them from the breast;

“ They may be rul'd, but will not be oppress.”

Taught hence, ye parents, who from nature stray,

And the great ties of social life betray;

Ne'er with your children act a tyrant's part:

'Tis yours to guide, not violate the heart.

Ye vainly wise, who o'er mankind preside, 520

Behold my righteous woes, and drop your pride;

Keep virtue's simple path before your eyes,

Nor think from evil good can ever rise.

EPILOGUE.

*CRAMM'D to the throat with wholesome moral stuff,
Alas, poor audience, you have had enough.
Was ever hapless heroine of a play
In such a piteous plight as ours to-day?
Was ever woman so by love betray'd?
Match'd with two husbands, and yet—die a maid.
But bless me!—hold—what sounds are these I hear—
I see the Tragic Muse herself appear.*

[The back scene opens, and discovers a romantic sylvan landscape; from which the Tragic Muse advances slowly to Music, and speaks the following lines:

*Hence with your flippant epilogue, that tries
To wipe the virtuous tear from British eyes;
That dares my moral, tragic scene profane,
With strains—at best, unsuited, light, and vain.
Hence from the pure unsullied beams that play—
In yon fair eyes where virtue shines—away!*

*Britons, to you from chaste Castalian groves,
Where dwell the tender, oft unhappy loves;
Where shades of heroes roam, each mighty name,
And court my aid to rise again to fame;
To you I come, to freedom's noblest seat,
And in Britannia fix my last retreat.*

*In Greece and Rome, I watch'd the public weal;
The purple tyrant trembled at my steel:*

*Nor did I less o'er private sorrows reign,
And mend the melting heart with softer pain.
On France and You then rose my brightning star,
With social ray—The arts are ne'er at war.
Oh, as your fire and genius strongly blaze,
As your's are generous freedom's bolder lays,
Let not the Gallic taste leave yours behind;
In decent manners and in life refin'd;
Banish the motly mode, to tag low verse,
The laughing ballad to the mournful herse.
When through five acts your hearts have learned to glow,
Touch'd with the sacred force of honest wo;
Oh, keep the dear impression on your breast,
Nor idly lose it for a wretched jest.*



7 JUL 52

